

# Deathrealm

The Land Where Horror Dwells

ISSUE # 20, WINTER 1993

U.S. \$4.95/CANADA \$6.00/O.S. \$8.00

FEATURING:

J. N. WILLIAMSON  
WILLIAM TROTTER

MARK RICH  
DEIDRA COX  
NANCY KILPATRICK  
And Many, Many Others!







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The Land Where Horror Dwells

DEATHREALM #20, WINTER, 93-94

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DEATHREALM (ISSN #1050-7027) is published quarterly by Tal Publications, PO Box 1837, Leesburg, VA 22075. Editorial address: 3223-F Regents Park, Greensboro, NC 27455. Printed by K. K. Stevens Publishing, 100 N. Pearl St., Astoria, IL 61501. All contents copyright, 1993. Nothing herein may be reproduced in part or in whole, except for short, credited excerpts for review purposes, without express written consent of the publisher. Rights to all printed works revert to their creators following publication in this magazine. Return postage must be included with all unsolicited material if a response is desired. All foreign correspondence must include adequate US postage or IRC's to insure response. Neither the editor nor publisher supplies free sample copies to potential subscribers/contributors. All submissions intended for publication should be sent to the editorial address above. Neither editor nor publisher is responsible for the care and/or return of unsolicited materials. All manuscripts intended for publication must be submitted in proper manuscript format, with author's name, address, story title and word count on the first page; the author's last name, story title and page number should appear in the top right corner of each page thereafter. All letters submitted to the editor and/or publisher are considered intended for publication unless specifically stated otherwise. Any similarity to persons living, dead or otherwise is purely coincidental. Send all orders and address changes to Stan Tal, Tal Publications, PO Box 1837, Leesburg, VA 22075. Contact editor at (919) 288-9138 or GENIE E-mail-S.RAINEY.

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# R. I. P.

Editorial ReMarks



THE DEATHREALM HALLOWEEN PARTY HOSTS, L - R: Peggy "Mrs. Deathrealm" Rainey, as Mrs. Deathrealm; James Robert Smith as Arthur Dent; Andrea Locke, as the Evil Mermaid; Ye Editor as Ye Phantom Editor of the Opera; Danielle D'Attilio as the Vampiric Seductress.

I WOULD VERY MUCH like to thank the many attendees of the 3rd DEATHREALM Halloween Bash (except for the couple of maroons who came round), held on Saturday, October 30, 1993, for their part in making the event a resounding success. There were enough bizarre and frightening costumes to keep the neighbors away for quite some time, and even though we went till nearly dawn, there was nary a complaint lodged against us (which clearly serves to illustrate the power of fear). Thanks to Jef Williams for his offering of the many pitchers of Green GD that put our poor Mr. Smith right out before he'd been able to enjoy the fruits of the evening's labor (some may be happy to know that he was slipped a very complimentary rejection slip as he dozed). And also a special round of applause for Ms. D'Attilio (the one who writes the REALLY mean rejections), who was shown the ceiling at uncomfortably close range by Brian "Basement Man" Hammil during a spectacular whirling dervish.

The letter column seems a bit sparse this time around. Can I happily assume that everyone is completely satisfied with the way the magazine's

going, and that no one wishes to write in and complain about horrendous editorial mismanagement or anything like that? As of issue #19, thanks to an incredible promotional effort by Mr. Tal and others, DEATHREALM has about doubled its circulation since issue #17, and is appearing in numerous new outlets, including Barnes & Nobles, Borders, Hastings, and many other chains and independent booksellers. We have established a deal with Ingram Distributors, the largest newsstand distributor in the country, so as of this issue, our circulation will hit another all-time high. So I admit to a little puzzlement over the fact that few readers are writing in to express their feelings about the magazine, or anything else that strikes their fancies. This fact makes me all the more peeved, because of a certain few (very few, by the way, but rather annoying) individuals who have accused DEATHREALM of being a "closed" market, and unopen to input from individuals who are not "already established" with the magazine. Nothing could be further from the truth, as anyone who follows this publication will note that I will run just about any letter that's submitted to me, be it praise, criticism, or just blathering about. I am constantly seeking

feedback, in hopes to provide the type of material that caters to their interests and that will ultimately be satisfying to as many readers as possible.

The same may be said of the fiction, art and poetry that appears in these pages. While I'm always happy to run material by those individuals whose names have come to be associated with quality and integrity, I also insist on running a healthy dose of work from new and talented contributors whose names at this point belong in the featherweight category. The best of them won't remain there for very long. And I'm more than happy to help put their names in front of a receptive reading audience.

So--if you're not pleased with what you see in these pages, LET ME KNOW! But don't dare tell me or anyone else that we are not receptive to your input. We thrive on it. We beg for it. Hurt us with it.

To close, a wee bit of shameless self-promo: I'd like to encourage everyone to check out my book of short stories, entitled **FUGUE DEVIL & OTHER WEIRD HORRORS**, recently released by Macabre, Inc. It's a very handsome trade paperback, all signed by the author (also a most handsome fellow!) ((hey, stop that!)) with beautiful artwork by Phillip Reynolds (last issue's cover artist) and Augie Wiedemann (whom we can't keep out of this magazine no matter how hard we try). It's a nice sampling of some of my weird stuff, and if the packaging alone doesn't sell you on it, give the work inside a try. It's available for \$5.95 + \$1.50 shipping & handling--that's a total of \$350, for those of you who have trouble with math--OK, I'm lying--from Macabre, Inc., 454 Munden Ave., Norfolk, VA 23505.

OK, that's enough of the shameless stuff this time around. Until the next....

Stephen Mark Rainey  
Editor



# INSIDE HORROR

## HOW TO HOST A HORROR

FOR THE LAST several years, author/poet **Lisa Lepovetsky** has been writing murder mystery games, both for private parties and dinner theatres. She tailors the games to her customers' needs, so the styles range from simple home-party whodunnits to elaborately staged murder scenes for larger gatherings--sometimes up to 40 people. This led naturally to a full-length courtroom play she wrote last year, based on a real murder trial from the 1800s.

Lepovetsky's fiction, poetry and non-fiction appear regularly in such publications as **DEATHREALM**, **GRUE**, **ELDRITCH TALES** and many more. Her poetry chapbook, **AS THE CARNY GOES BY**, is available from Night Wings Press, and she is currently working on her fourth novel.

## MR. SMITH GOES BACK TO THE FUTURE

EVEN WHILE SERVING time as assistant fiction editor for **DEATHREALM**, **James Robert Smith**, recognized in the comic industry for his scripting for such titles as **TABOO** and Clive Barker's **HELLRAISER** series, has turned his efforts toward a new independent comic entitled **THE JAMES GANG**. In the year 2000, President Buchanan has suspended all civil rights. A computer program called "The Net" is the ultimate in crowd control. But, a glitch in the system triggers a telekinetic surge generated by the oppressed population, and five people are transformed into something more than human. The five, including two black guys who are the reincarnations of Frank & Jess James, form a gang and they kick fascist ass.

**JAMES GANG** #1 is 40 pp. black and white comic with full color

wrap-around cover. Price is \$3.25 postpaid from COMICS & TOYS, 6343 Albemarle Road, Charlotte NC 28212.



*James Robert Smith--Associate Fiction Editor for **DEATHREALM** and author of **THE JAMES GANG**.*

## MACABRE, INC. LAUNCHES NEW HORROR LINE

**MACABRE, INC.**, A new specialty press publisher based in Norfolk, Virginia, announces its line of short story collections, which will debut this fall. Each collection will be released as a trade paperback, about 100 pages in length, with 2-color covers and profuse interior illustrations. Each edition will be signed by the author, with a limited press run of 1,000 copies.

Macabre's lineup features six authors, including **DEATHREALM** editor Stephen Mark Rainey, David Niall Wilson, Lois Tilton, Nancy Kilpatrick, Brian Hopkins and John Rosenman. Mr. Rainey's collection, **FUGUE DEVIL & OTHER WEIRD HORRORS** was released in November and is currently available. Successive books will be released each nine months thereafter.

**FUGUE DEVIL** may be ordered directly from Macabre, Inc. for \$5.95 + \$1.50 p & h. To order, or to receive more information, write to: Macabre, Inc., 454 Munden Ave., Norfolk, VA 23505.

## ROADKILL PRESS WINS WORLD FANTASY AWARD

**DOUG & TOMI LEWIS**, owners of Roadkill Press and the Denver area bookstore The Little Bookshop of Horrors have won the prestigious World Fantasy Convention's Special Award for outstanding non-professional publisher and editor for 1993. The Lewis', who opened TLBH in 1989 say in interview with Bob Morrish in **CEMETERY DANCE** (Winter, 1993), that Roadkill Press was actually a consequence of the bookstore. Their chapbook, **MR. FOX & OTHER FERAL TALES**, by Norman Partridge, won the 1993 Bram Stoker Award for Best Collection. In addition to their bookstore and publications operations, they sponsor frequent readings for horror writers, who come from around the country to promote their work. Congratulations to Doug and Tomi Lewis for their award and for their continuing efforts to promote horror, dark fantasy & dark suspense.

## SCI-CON DRAWS SCI-FI & HORROR FANS TO VIRGINIA BEACH

THE WEEKEND OF November 12-14, 1993 saw a gathering of over 500 SF/F/H fans at the Holiday Inn Executive Center in Virginia Beach for **SCI-CON 15**. The con's Guest of Honor was **Timothy Zahn**, author of dozens of best-selling SF novels, including the latest in the **STAR WARS** saga. The horror contingent was well-provided for as well; guests included **DEATHREALM**'s **Mark & Peggy Rainey**, **Stan Tal & Donna Higgins**, **James Robert Smith**, **Elizabeth Massie**, **Dave & Joanne Wilson** of **THE TOME**, **Zachary Kane**, **Graham Watkins**, and others.

A fine time was had by all, in spite of the f\*cking filkers.



# Shadows

Out From Ye

Ye Letter Columnne

William Andrew  
Eugene, OR

RECEIVED #19 YESTERDAY and read it last night. Very handsome production with contents to match. The letters column was so lively I dug out #18 so I could refresh myself regarding my own opinions of the fiction. *Numhed* was a standout, and Don D' Ammassa's fiction was pretty good, too, despite what one of the locs said. Dillon's short piece was effective as well; now we'll all be extra wary of flies....

As for #19, my thoughts: *Inside Horror* works; keep it up. Good idea. Story by Smith kept surprising me; I thought I knew where it was going, how it would end, and it veered completely away from expectations. A dangerous boy, Smith.

Andrea Locke. Forgive me, but who is she? All I know is that she seems to savage some zines (she was way too hard on CPAOD for instance) with a bit more relish than is necessary. So vile, so despicable--and why didn't you print more?

*Cleaving*. I read it three times; I didn't understand it at all but each time I finished it, the story seemed funnier than before. Now watch, you'll be inundated with silly little pointless stories....

I'd like to compliment you on your choice of cover artwork, for #'s 18 and 19. It's good to see an editor avoid the usual skulls and animated skeletons and eviscerations, etc. The cover of #19 is especially effective. To me, it portrays psychic torment of unbearable extreme. I think it captures perfectly the kind of package the reader unwraps as he delves into DEATHREALM.

Looking forward to #20.

Jeffrey Thomas  
Westborough, MA

WELL, PHIL REYNOLDS' cover of #19 might be the best cover of DEATHREALM yet. I prefer the addition of

red ink to green, and that painting-man! The winged thing is like something by Goya. A fine prelude to the quality within the covers (and glad to see art returned to the inside covers).

The best stories for me would be those by Clegg and Doolittle, both honestly terrifying and very well-written. Clegg's story was all the more horrifying for its restrained, literary presentation, its hyper-realistic sense of place. Doolittle's was frightening for the inexplicable behavior of the stranger (really played upon our fear of bland-faced strangers!), the culmination of his actions in the airport truly hideous. Talk about putting a guilt trip on somebody! It isn't easy to make a jaded horror reader's flesh crawl, but these two did it.

Tom Brown's story was very simple but a spooky, traditional ghost story for Halloween-time, nicely told. *Toke Ghost* was another story, like Clegg's and Brown's, heavy on setting (which too few short story writers take the time to concern themselves with), a weird cross between *Of Mice and Men*, *River's Edge* and a Cheech & Chong movie. Cool. The last line holds interesting implications. Rex Miller's *X* feels like an experiment; a concept rather than a story. Interesting, but it circles back on itself too often in irritating (unnecessary) Biblical fashion (God has created humans male and female, then in the next paragraph He decides to make the first woman...and then, in addition to the creation of Adam and Eve, our evolution from ape-men is also much later mentioned; talk about covering your bets, Rex!). There's an admittedly impressive onslaught of scientific dazzle toward the end in an Ellison-esque barage, but ultimately I didn't care for the muddled feel of the piece.

I dislike humor, but *Cleaving* had me laughing out loud. I loved it. Brilliant. Kind of funny that it follows the

story by, and interview with, the creator of *Chaingang*.

*Howling Wind* was okay; a very scary premise but a bit predictable and told in somewhat too light a tone. Finally, the story by S. Darnbrook Colson, "the Bad Boy of Horror," was not bad but neither was it *bad* (or even good), which sums up all his stories I've read so far. Sorry to see that in gaining TAL, you also inherited Mr. Colson, like the in-laws of a marriage, even to the point where his name (but sans title, at least) must go on the cover. I wouldn't mock him or judge him as harshly but for the shameless hyping (does Colson have incriminating photos of Mr. Tal or something?). As it stands, I'm sorry to say Colson has become an object of some ridicule among horror writers I speak with.

Sorry, too: thought the poem *Bamabas* summed up everything I dislike about the breathless, turgid strain of vampire necrophilia (the poem even steals the ad line from Coppola's disjointed *Dracula* for its own last line).

But by far, a wonderful issue. DEATHREALM is absolutely superb; I relish even holding it. The wannabes cower and shiver and lick your muddy, trampin'-in-the-woods-with-lots-of-guns boots.

James Robert Smith  
Charlotte, NC

I'VE READ MOST of the new issue, Mark. Really, really liked the story *Photos Of A Leg*, plus the Tom Brown ghost story. Really, really disliked *Howling Wind* and *Cleaving* (which, even as a joke was no good). Liked the letters page, too. Good job.

(Later.) Finished the issue. The Sean Doolittle story, *David* was quite good. But, the Fassl illustration for it was superb! Not only did he capture the plot and essence of the tale, the quality of the artwork was exceptional. Harry is one of the finest artists working the field. I hope it pays off for him in funds more liquid than fan appreciation. Hated the Colson story, ditto on the Rex Miller piece. Yech, Mark.

Oh, I did indeed like the Clegg tale. But I thought t. Winter-Damon did an awful job of interviewing Miller--the presentation and his own chatty asides



## YE LETTER COLUMN

sucked. Don't let him do any more interviews if that's the kind of results you're going to get.

**Jef Williams**  
Winston-Salem, NC

I HAVE JUST read **DEATHREALM** #19 and I am left wondering what in the hell was plopped in Greensboro's water supply.

Way back when **DEATHREALM** was but a small thing, my head spun with frightful tales by Osier and Sallee, but now your pedestal is tarnished. **DEATHREALM** has had its gloss and polish sanded off with a nuclear-tipped power chisel. For instance, why does Mz. Locke feel that she must vent her personal feelings about her ex in the otherwise good magazine reviews? But this is not my real gripe.

When I got my subscription, the brochure said, "For the very best in Horror and Dark Fantasy, look to **DEATHREALM**." Now, I can't believe what I am seeing. Was I supposed to think Douglas Clegg's *The Hurting Season* was a fictional story about coastal North Carolina? I have spent a great part of my adult life wandering around in those beds of tidal backwash, and I can assure you that his story is not of fictitious horror but of a documentary nature.

I might as well read **NATIONAL GEOGRAPHIC**! ((But thanks for renewing your subscription, Jeff-Ye Ed))

**S. Darnbrook Colson**  
Leesburg, VA

**DEATHREALM** #19 LOOKS fabulous. What a terrific job you and Tal are doing with it. Thought Klosterman did a nice job on the art. Thought the *Inside Horror* page was a cool addition to the mag and really like the mix of fiction, articles, interviews and reviews. All the fiction was first class, but particularly enjoyed Doug Clegg's *The Hurting Season* and Rex Miller's unique and interesting story *X*. Clegg really knows how to set a scene. James Robert Smith's *Toke Ghost* was very nicely done. Once again enjoyed Karl Edward Wagner's *View From Carcosa* column. Oh, and the art by Chris Friend on the inside front

cover was nice and dark and creepy. Like the Reynolds front cover work, too.

**Fred Chappell**  
Greensboro, NC

NO SOONER DO I remark upon Andrea Locke's sweet charity than she turns the treatment on my *Lodger*. Thanks, Andrea, I needed that!

And I had lots of fun with other pages, too: especially the columns and Douglas Clegg's story and Chris Friend's illustration.

And now that we've got Earl Douchette, why do we need Rex Miller? Susan and I send all the best.

**Vincent White**  
Union City, CA

RECENTLY PICKED UP issue #19 of **DEATHREALM** and am truly impressed by the quality of the fiction and articles within.

While some of the stories fell pretty flat, such as Rex Miller's over-indulgent re-working of Genesis and Jeffrey Thomas' attempt at Lovecraftian thriller, the overall contributions were superb. My personal favorite was *Toke Ghost* by James Robert Smith: starting off with its purple prose, then drifting into the back alleys, this story is a classic, surprising me with what *could* have been a fairly predictable ending by throwing in a final shocking twist. Another favorite from this issue was *David*, by Sean Doolittle, which reminded me of the Charles Beaumont simple-stories-simply-told style, until the stunning, rapid fire conclusion.

The columns were entertaining and informative as well, with many insightful comments on new horror fiction. I especially enjoyed the interview with Rex Miller, who remains one of the best writers in the field today, despite his weak contribution to this particular issue. Some of the illos were also quite good, especially Fassl's trademark "obscure, real-life" collage.

Looking forward to the next issue!

**Stephanie O'Rourke**  
Des Moines, IA

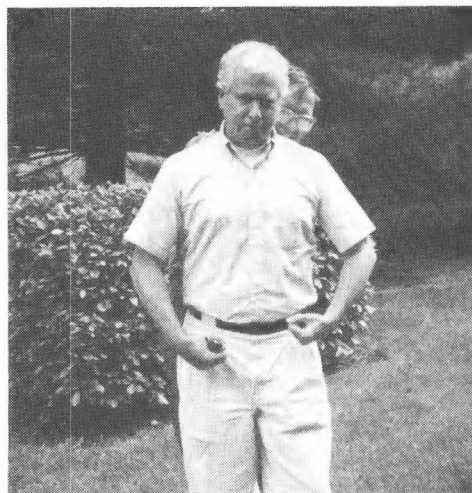
I RECENTLY HAPPENED upon **DEATHREALM** Magazine at a local

store and found it to be of much interest. It is a very nice package with lots of good writing and artwork. I really was struck by the frightening cover painting, though I have to confess, I'm not really sure what it means, especially in relation to the contents of the issue. No matter, though--it really grabs attention.

My favorite story was Scott Thomas' *Photos of a Leg*. I really like stories about aliens and weird creatures, and this one was just perfect. Not overly explanatory, and with interesting characters, much like the best movies in the field.

I've never read anything by Rex Miller before, but I liked his very weird *X*. It had an interesting, rather Biblical tone which I appreciated. Jeffrey Thomas' *Cells* was also good, with characters you could sympathize with. It wasn't very scary, which was what I was expecting, but didn't disappoint me.

Good luck in the future.



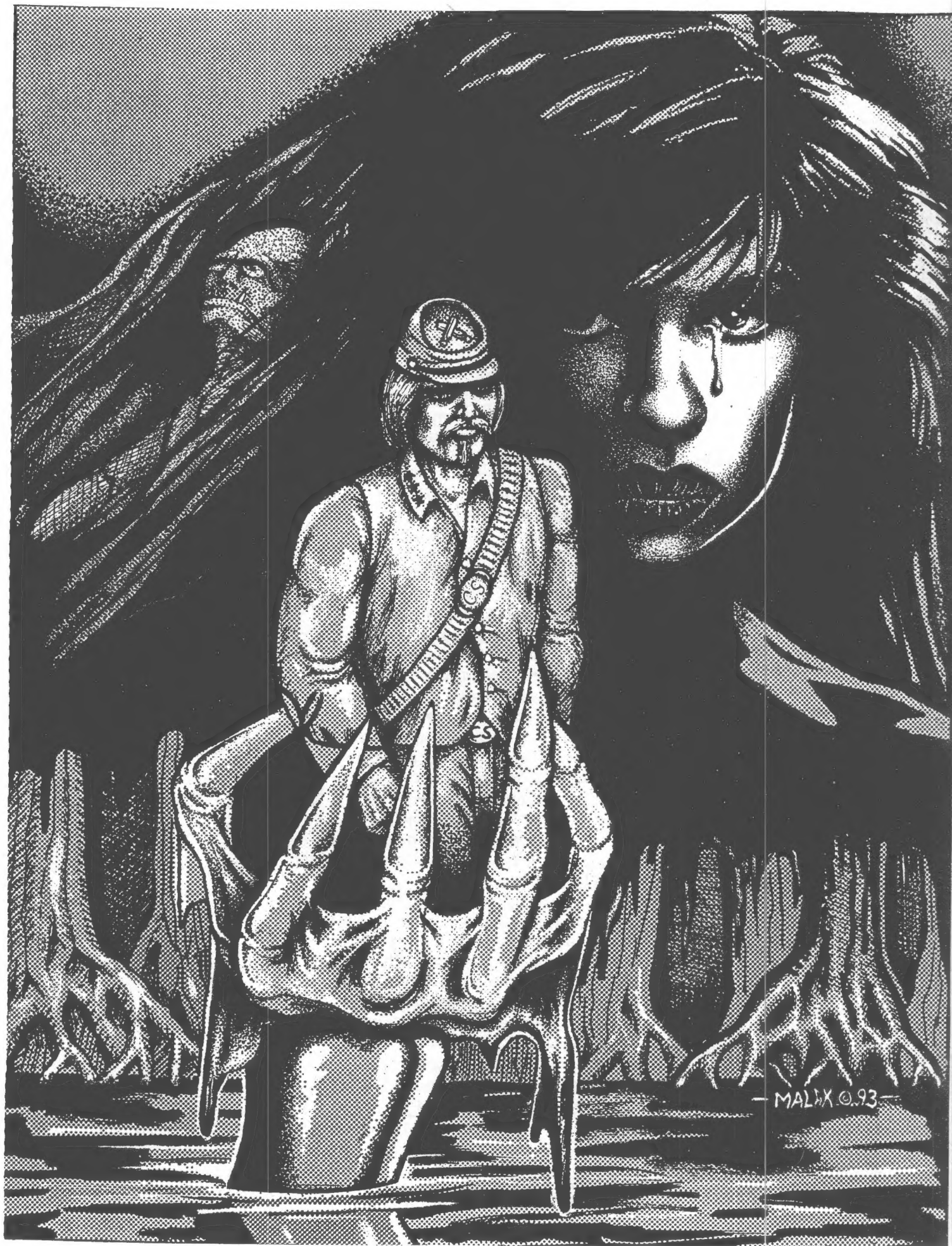
*The Incriminating picture of Mr. Tal*

### READER COMMENTS ARE WELCOMED!

The editors love to hear from you. Drop us a line!

Write to:  
LETTERS TO THE EDITOR  
c/o **DEATHREALM**  
3223-F Regents Park  
Greensboro, NC 27455-1960  
or e-mail on GEnie:  
**S.RAINEY**





—MALIX ©.93—



# The Siren of Swanquarter

By William Trotter

YOU SAW A lot of men like the Major during that last grey winter of the war. Men who had to walk into the fire too many times and who had been pushed into it yet again, time after time, because there was no one else to do it, nobody left who was fresh and strong and wild the way all those boys had been the first year after Fort Sumter. A lot of them were dead; if not, they were like the Major: old men walking around in thirty-year-old skins.

When the Major boarded the train that January morning, his one remaining hand hooked over the iron rungs like a talon, I saw right away that he was not a man for small talk. I respected his need for the silence that he kept wrapped around him like a cloak. Once we were underway, I started reading a book. There was no point in trying to talk to the fireman--a dull-witted boy who, in learning how to read a steam pressure gauge, had reached the acme of his intellectual development.

We were rolling northeast with a load of re-bored rifles, hardtack, and petticoat bandages donated by the good ladies of Charleston. Our immediate destination was the junction at Florence; once there, we would be turn-tabled around and pointed northeast, so that we would eventually end up in Fayetteville, where Joe Johnston's command was scraping together whatever men and supplies were to be had, in a final effort to stop Sherman. What with the deterioration of the roadbed, not to mention the disrepair of the train itself, there was no telling how long the trip would take.

The Major was in charge of the "armed escort" for the train; four boys, the oldest of whom was, maybe, sixteen. The Major bedded them down in a half-empty boxcar at the end of the train. "I hope that's the last I see of them until we get to North Carolina," he grumbled, pulling his hat down low over his forehead and re-entering that private enclosure of silence.

It was a lowland winter dawn when we rattled out of Charleston: a cold, thin-blooded morning, with lakes of mist gathered in the fields and the low-hanging moss slapping heavy and wet against the tops of the cars. When the sun finally came out, it was a flat wafer, lemon-rind white, that brought little warmth.

We had just crossed the Santee River bridge, near midday, when the fireman spotted armed men on the tracks ahead. They turned out to be ours: South Carolina militia, old men and boys, mounted on mules whose ribs you could count at fifty paces.

Their news was bad. Federal cavalry had passed through Cheraw during the night, bending rails and firing trestles. Nobody knew whether they were moving in our direction, or had turned back to rejoin Sherman's advance guard. In either case, it was pointless as well as dangerous to keep going on our present course. I put the engine in reverse and we began

inching backwards. The Major leaned out one side of the cab and watched the ragged, ill-armed band of militia receding at the point of a cold shining "V" of track, a tiny dot of butter-nut against the dull wintry green of the fields.

"They'd better pray to God no Federal cavalry comes down that line," he said, touching the butt of the big navy Colt on his hip.

"Don't see why they should," I remarked. "They've already cut the line at one of its main terminals; cutting it again, closer to Charleston, would gain them very little advantage."

"I suppose we have to crawl into the city backwards, then."

"Maybe not. About halfway between here and Charleston, there's a spur line that joins this track. I've never been on it, but I know about where it should be, and if we go slow we ought to be able to spot it. If the switch works, we can put this train on that line and head north through Altamahaw County. Eventually, we'll rejoin the Wilmington-Goldsboro line somewhere below the Cape Fear River bridge."

As I explained this, I saw in a change in the Major's features. A shadow passed through his eyes; his jaw worked as though he were grinding his teeth at the sound of my words.

"I did not know there was such a rail line," he said.

"That's probably because nobody's run a train over it for ten years. Back then, it was a branch outfit called the Wilmington-Santee Coast line. The owners put it in to give direct service to the rice plantations along this part of the coast. Went bankrupt doing it, though."

"Why was that?" The Major leaned forward with more than just a conversational interest.

"They couldn't keep the crews together long enough to make much progress. When work started on the line, they contracted for enough blacks to cut brush and lay track--got them through some of the largest slave brokers in Wilmington. Everything went smoothly until they started putting track through the Altamahaw region. Two weeks into that section of the project, the blacks all ran off--just high-tailed it into the swamps. The same thing happened with the next batch of laborers. The company hired guards and extra overseers, but it didn't seem to help. One, two weeks after each batch of nigras went to work, they'd run off. Lots of them got killed, but it didn't stop the others; I heard, too, that some of the overseers who went into the swamps after them never came back either.

"Eventually the company had to go out and hire white crews and pay them top dollar to finish the job. The whole thing was way behind schedule by then, and only a few trains ran over the line before the banks stepped in and shut down the whole operation. The line may not be passable any longer, but we won't know unless we try."

"You said the line goes through Altamahaw County?" The Major's voice was disturbed, fleetingly, like when wind glances off of calm water. "Does it pass near the plantation at Swanquarter?"

"I don't rightly know," I replied. "I understand the line stays on this side of the main rivers, but that part of the Uhwarrie basin is unfamiliar to me personally."

"I suppose it will be all right...." he muttered, his voice so low that I could scarcely hear him above the engine noises.

For the next two hours, we moved carefully in reverse,

not passing a living soul, our smoke plume hanging over the grey cotton fields so bereft of movement, so muted in color, as to seem stricken by a plague.

As we retraced our morning's journey, the Major's uneasiness revealed itself openly in a gradual thawing of conversation. We exchanged information in the eternal manner of strangers meeting on a long trip, learning fragmentary things about each other's families, birth-places and youthful aspirations. By the time we spotted the place where the spur line joined the main track, we had carried our mutual narratives up to the beginning of the war.

It required a concerted, rhythmic effort by all three of us to break the seal of rust that covered the switch. Then we backed up to get running room and slowly nosed the locomotive through a mask of weeds and on to the disused tracks. We moved very slowly at first, for I had no knowledge of the condition of the line, and the emptiness and lack of habitation in this region would have made something serious out of even a minor accident.

The roadbed was soft and crumbly, and it had been put down arrow-straight across a barren sweep of marsh. Long hummocks of grass rolled up like the backs of whales, surrounded by a sea of still, brackish water that reached, in places, to within a few feet of the tracks. To our left, the marsh was bounded by a far horizon of blue-grey pines, while on the other, seaward side, the only breaks in the monotony of marsh were occasional lakes of tar-colored water, from whose surface the blackened stumps of rotted cypress trees protruded like bad teeth. A rich, dark odor of decay permeated the air.

As if to divert his own attention from the landscape, the Major began to talk more volubly as we went deeper into the Altamahaw wilderness.

As a lieutenant in the U.S. coast artillery, he had resigned his commission and taken sides with the Confederacy in the feverish days just after Fort Sumter. His experience and his youthful ardor made him a valuable officer, and he was soon promoted. Even after that ardor cooled, professionalism remained. He was in the thick of a dozen battles, great and small. And in September of '63, while he was commanding a battery of three-inch Parrott rifles in Longstreet's corps, a spent meanie-ball (falling from such extreme range that he could never be sure which side might have fired it) struck and shattered his left hand. The surgeons had taken that part of him off cleanly, just above the wrist.

At this point he paused in his narrative, and his gaze once more swept the dismal landscape. It was now late afternoon, and there was enough of a chill coming back into the air to make us grateful for the heat of the cab. The roadbed was elevated here; we crept above a desert of aimless, meandering black streams, their surfaces scummed with the bodies of moribund insects--all part of the uncharted maze of waterways that eventually came together to form the great Uwharrie River. It was this myriad of channels and creeks that had given life to the rice plantations of the early 1800's. The land that interspersed these nameless tributaries was an impenetrable jungle of needlebrush, scrub oaks, longleaf pine and gum trees. The thin, pearly light gave a waxen tint to the greens and a rusted, treacly look to the water. At rare intervals, soli-

tary live oaks, bearded with enormous plumes of moss, towered like seneschals above the welter of lower foliage.

No sir, I thought; it would not have been pleasant work laying track through this place. As for the negroes who vanished from the work gangs, the summertime mosquitos had probably just picked them up and flown off with them.

The Major's voice dispelled my reverie; he was speaking of what had happened to him after the loss of this hand. *That* wound had healed as swiftly as could have been expected. But even as the arm healed, the rest of his body, suffering from the accumulated strain of two years' combat, seemed to fail. He came down with a fever that racked him savagely; brought him, in fact, closer to death than the loss of his hand had.

His recovery, at the big Confederate hospital in Greensboro, was slow and marked by numerous relapses. He recuperated there from October until January of 1864, at which time he was judged fit to return to light duties. He was ordered to Wilmington, where he advised on the siting of shore batteries and other harbor defenses.

His strength gradually returned during the long coastal spring; and if his youth was gone forever, as detached from him as his severed hand, he was not insensible to the languorous charms of Wilmington--the only southern port where the blockade was still pierced with any regularity, and consequently an oasis of prosperity and good living, even that late in the war.

In June of 1864, as the first glaze of summer settled over the region, turning the expanses of the Cape Fear estuary into a vast coppery glare, he was ordered to Charleston, to assume full duties with the artillery garrison of that city. There was a generous amount of time allowed for his journey, so he decided to go by horse rather than by train. The prospect of a slow, quiet ride down the coast appealed to his, by now, rather solitary nature. He provisioned a mule, obtained a good horse--in Wilmington, it was still possible to find such a thing--and set out at dawn, while a coolness still nested in the palmettos.

I interrupted the Major's story at this point by stopping the train and igniting the big oil-fired headlamp. When we started again, I increased the speed to take advantage of the remaining hour of daylight; the track, though wobbly, had so far been as safe as that of the main line behind us. We could gain a few miles now, for when darkness came we would again have to reduce speed--only a fool would outrun his headlamp on a stretch of unknown line.

With the dramatic suddenness that seems to be characteristic of this desolate region, the landscape changed yet again. The track had been bearing westward in a long, gradual curve, probably taking us away from the seasonal floodline of the great bend of the Uwharrie--unseen, but still a tangible presence brooding in the gloom on our eastern side. We entered now a flat, relatively dry expanse of pine-barrens.

After the jungly, tropical luxuriance of the swamp, the spartan regularity of this terrain was startling. Low, wiry grasses carpeted the sandy earth. The tall straight trees grew with such uniform distribution that they seemed to have been planted by design. Indeed, the trees were like shafts, piercing an immense, heavy volume of space; like thin rigid spines



upholding a ceiling of green, fretted stone. As oppressive and uninviting as the swamps had seemed, those long, precisely defined corridors of silent space seemed to radiate a subtle feeling of menace. Nothing larger than a snake could have hidden in that pine-vaulted emptiness, but no man could have walked there without feeling that he had violated an *arrangement* of elements that held no welcome for him.

The sun fluttered like torchflame beyond the limits of the pine-barrens, where distance blurred the serried ranks of trees into a vague curtain, pierced by shafts of ruby light. The effect of the train's motion and the declining light, the hypnotic regularity of the trees' spacing, conjured the sensation of being bathed in a cold red vibration, like the undulations of an organ pedal note so low as to be on the threshold of hearing. Then, quite suddenly, the effect, and the light itself, were gone, and the pine-barrens were swallowed by a great gulp of shadow.

I was shaken to hear a sigh--almost a groan of pain--escape the Major's pale lips. Whether this was occasioned by some internal discomfort, or by the fall of night itself, I did not know, but I was determined to administer the only medicine available at the moment. Reaching into the iron locker at the rear of the cab, I found the almost-full jug of country whiskey I had put there the previous night. The Major accepted the jug with visible gratitude and we settled down to split it between us--occasionally giving the fireman a taste, but only that.

Between the firebox and the whiskey, conditions grew as cozy in the cab as might be possible on a January night, and it was not long before the Major resumed his tale.

The first two days' ride south from Wilmington had been like a peacetime excursion for him. The weather was moderate, and during the period of mid-day heat, he found pleasant spots to stop for a few hours. At that time there was still a real, though already declining, radius of prosperity around Wilmington; the farms still had crops, and blacks to bring them in. The white menfolk were gone, of course, but the Major was welcomed by wives and daughters whose patriotism was still high and who hoped that he might bring them some chance bit of news about their husbands and brothers.

He rode as far as Bellarthur the first day, passed through Watauga Junction at noon the second day, and pressed on into the dusk to find accommodations for the night at Carteret, where there had once been a regular ferry service across the Uwharrie and into Altamahaw County.

After reprovisioning the mule and obtaining a bed for the night, the Major walked down to the spot where the road dipped into the low, mud-streaked river. The ferry was pulled up on the sand, caked with brittle clay and festooned with dry moss, so old that it crumbled into grit when he rubbed it with his fingers. The ferry ropes, too, faintly outlined where the shoulders of the river still held a faint gloss of reflected sky, showed wisps of old moss, old as the last spring flood.

The Major stared across the river, sighting down the line of the ropes as though they were a rifle barrel. The far shore of the Uwharrie, where the unmarked and never-surveyed boundary of Altamahaw County snaked its way along the curves of the river, was a flat black wall of trees and underbrush. The slow breath of the river's passage seemed only to accent the intense silence that brooded on the far shore.

There was light on in a shack near the beached ferry, and inside the Major found the boatman, playing checkers with an ancient black man who neither spoke nor, beyond first glance, even looked at the Major when he introduced himself and inquired about ferry services.

"Ferry don't run no more, not since the winter of '63," said the boatman.

"Why not?"

The boatman looked up, a red checker pinned between two dirty fingers, and grinned lopsidedly, "Ain't nobody wantin' to use it, is why."

"I want to use it," countered the Major. "I have orders that take me to Charleston and I see no other way to get there."

**As oppressive and uninviting as the swamps had seemed, those long, precisely defined corridors of silent space seemed to radiate a subtle feeling of menace. No man could walk there without feeling that he had violated an arrangement of elements that held no welcome for him...**

The boatman swilled the potent-smelling liquor from a dirty gourd. "Wull, I reckon you could swim!"

With his one hand, the Major pulled the man to his feet and batted the gourd to the floor.

"And you could do an honest day's work for an honest gold piece, or by God I will find someone who can!"

The ferryman's eyes flickered in the direction of the Major's revolver; he swallowed, made placating gestures with his hands. "You said 'gold piece'? Not Confederate paper? You got yourself a ride, mister. Just name the time."

"First light tomorrow. You'll get paid when I get across."

Lowland fog shrouded the river at dawn. The ferry ropes squealed from disuse as the rickety craft moved into a grey limbo. The Uwharrie was restless that morning, and low, sullen swells rolled up out of the mist that slopped over the sides of the boat. The ferryman, sober and made deferential by the prospect of solid coin, manifested a bleary-eyed form of cheer.

"Don't know why you didn't take the inland trains, Major. It's a long ride to Charleston."

"I wanted a long ride. Tell me, is there a village up ahead where I can spend the night?"

"Nothing between here and the Coosawatchie but ninety miles of lonesome road."

"Aren't there at least some farmhouses where I might stay?"

There was the briefest pause before the boatman answered. "Nothing, Major. There ain't nothing on that side of the river any more, leastways not anything fit for a white man."

## THE SIREN OF SWANQUARTER

You see cabins back in the pines, but you'd best keep your distance. Not many folks livin' in Altamahaw these days, but some that do is runaway slaves, livin' back in the swamps like some kind of animals. If you stay away from them, I reckon they'll leave you alone, too."

The far shore suddenly loomed, black and dripping and wreathed with fog, and the keel crunched on bottom-sand. The ferryman's attitude became one of bumbling eagerness as he assisted in the unloading of the mule and the horse. The fare was exchanged, the boatman bowed nervously, and the Major stood--absently stroking the muzzle of his mount--watching the ferryboat as it was absorbed by the mist, its return passage thereafter marked only by the disembodied creak of its ropes. The Major was an educated man, and the mythological aspects of the scene were not lost to him; he was also a worldly man, and recognition of them brought a faint smile to his lips.

When the mist burned away, the Major saw that the coastal road through Altamahaw was indeed lonesome. It curved up from the river through a tangle of forest, skirting a myriad of blackwater streams that fed into the Uhwarrie. His horse nosed skittishly through dense patches of sharp-edged savannah grass that had reclaimed all but the deepest ruts. On either side, the vegetation typical of the coastal plains grew in wild profusion. The Major recognized long leaf and scrub pines, turkey oaks, wax myrtle, bald cypress and tupelo gum--but for every species he could identify, there were several others that were strange to him.

Further on, a mile or two from the river, the road skirted a blackwater lake nearly a mile across, its surface pocked with stubs of rotted trees. A solitary chalk-white egret pecked at an unseen breakfast, one of the few birds the Major had seen all morning.

Several times, he passed ruined farm houses: raw grey warped lumber peeling back at the corners, chimneys crumbling, the fields returning to swamp and the yards overgrown with waist high savannah grass.

A sward of loamy ground, a hillock crowned with a solitary oak, gave shade for a spartan meal. The heat had grown oppressive and the sun was perpendicular above the road. After he finished eating, the Major tried to doze away an hour of the heat.

But the animals were restless--even the phlegmatic mule kept pacing back and forth, testing the rope that tethered it. Their movement and whinnying kept waking the Major. After a few brief intervals of dozing, he accepted the situation, loosened his tunic against the heat, and resumed his journey. For no reason he could clearly define, he too was restless and eager to keep moving.

An hour beyond that stopping place, the landscape changed from one of dense water-veined forest to an open expanse of pine-barrens. The sudden widening of horizons that came with these immense groves should have lightened the Major's spirits; indeed, had done so on previous occasions during his first two days of travel. But as one hour went by, then a second, the vastness, the monotony, the heavy silence--like that of an abandoned cathedral--grew steadily more oppressive. It was not that the Major felt observed by

hidden eyes--a sensation familiar enough to him from combat--but rather a feeling that the whole of this interminable wilderness was holding its breath until he passed through it.

More disturbing were the occasional tracks--mostly footprints but some wagon tracks as well--that debouched from the main road and ran straight into the depths of the pine-barrens. The Major stared down the length of these mysterious roads until their sandy whiteness reached a vanishing point far away in the tree-haze. He saw no signs of dwellings, no smoke from chimneys, no rusting implements or bits of harness to indicate normal human traffic; yet plainly these tracks had been used as often as the main road. Moreover, when the Major stopped to examine the first few of these intersections, the balkiness of his animals increased. Experimentally, he tried to ride some distance down one of the paths, but the horse moved as though he were walking through belly-deep molasses and, remembering the ferryman's story about runaway blacks, the Major did not force the animal to continue.

When the lowering sun threw pine-shadows across the road, the Major was still riding through the barrens. Thin shallow bodies of black water had started to appear, breaking up the monotonous, depressing sweep of the landscape, indicating that more swampland lay ahead. How far ahead, the Major could not guess. He wanted to be free of the pine-barrens before dark, but he had no wish to blunder into unseen quicksand. Weighing the alternatives, he decided to camp where he was.

He spent the last half-hour of twilight gathering firewood. The animals were tethered just inside the ring of firelight, while the Major put down his bedroll some distance away, figuring that the light would divert some of the insects from himself. Perhaps it did. Perhaps this arrangement also saved his life.

Darkness in the pine-barrens was no more pleasant than daylight had been--a good deal less so. The Major now admitted to himself that there was something about this region that engendered anxiety. But he was a disciplined man, and he knew that exhaustion would inevitably overcome fear; knew also that fear would keep his slumber light, and vulnerable to the slightest noise from the animals.

The first whimper from the horse woke him instantly. Acting on instinct, he hurled an armful of dry resinous pine boughs onto the guttering fire. In seconds, the sap burst violently into flame and within that same interval--with stunning quickness--several other things happened as well.

Just beyond the radius of light, an outline of solid darkness leaped to one side. The mule staggered from an unseen blow, uttered a wild ululating shriek, snapped the rope that tethered it and fled, roaring with pain, into the forest.

As the Major struggled to his feet and tugged at his Colt, the shape of darkness gathered itself into a crouch, then catapulted into the air. For the briefest instant, the creature passed through the flickering perimeter of firelight: the thing had long, tapering legs, with a chest and head grotesquely swollen. Its outline was sleek with powerful muscle; flame-light winked on its large nocturnal eyes and rippled across the bared teeth which were the only visible features of its flat,



misshapen head.

In the split-second during which the creature was outlined by firelight, the Major fired. The heavy .44 caliber ball struck somewhere on the beast's lower body, the impact of it against flesh as solid and unmistakable as the sound of an axe hitting wood. The thing crashed into the darkness with a hoarse grunt of pain. It struggled to its feet near the place where the horse bucked and lashed the shadows with its hooves. As the Major sought to fire without hitting the horse, he saw a sabre-shape of darkness--an arm, perhaps, or a paw--slice into the plunging belly of the horse. With a wet and terrible sound, the horse's entrails bloomed forth into firelight, an obscene purple orchid.

Three more times the Major fired into the darkness in the direction of the receding sounds. Then, deafened and momentarily blinded by muzzle flash, he stood, stunned into immobility, filmed with sweat, rubbing his eyes.

He reloaded first, then stoked the fire into a furious blaze that illuminated the pines in a wide circle. By this light he inspected the horse; a quick glance confirmed what he already suspected. He fired one more ball into the tortured animal's brain. As the horse's screams ended, he could hear, far in the distance, the agonized braying of the mule. A dozen times the pathetic beast howled, then the screams ended, abruptly, with a choked silence that was more horribly suggestive than the screams themselves.

For three hours the Major fed the fire and sat with his back to it, staring into the pines until the strain wove patterns of illusion over his sight. But nothing further disturbed the silence and, finally, when it was light enough to discern the trees a hundred feet away, he permitted the fire to go out.

Morning found him trudging on foot down the road. He debated whether to turn back or press on, but there was no way to summon the ferry from this side of the river, and from his rough knowledge of the region's geography, he believed himself to be about halfway through the Altamahaw wilderness. It could have been worse: he had a full canteen, a saddlebag with provisions for several days, and a Colt pistol whose reliability had already been proven.

It had to have been the attack of a wildcat, he reasoned. Such creatures were not unheard of in the remoter coastal regions. The disturbing strangeness of its shape was surely due to his own overwrought mental state, or to the trickiness of the firelight. He resolved to sleep that night on an island, putting some water between himself and any other predators.

The journey soon became an ordeal for him. He was not the indefatigable youth he had been during the campaigns of previous years, when a march of twenty miles in one long day would not have been considered remarkable. His legs began to ache by mid-day, and by early afternoon he could feel the creeping pain of a blister, grinding its way up from the worn leather of his right boot. He tried to measure his walk, but by late afternoon, he was limping. It was time to find a secure place for the night.

On either side of the road, the forest had closed in once more; great tumbles of foliage sprawled out toward the road as though trying to engulf it. Briars, vines and saw-edged grass formed an impenetrable wall, and the ground that supported

them was treacherous and boggy. Occasionally, through the thickets, he glimpsed sunlight dazzling off a large body of water. He stumbled on, throat tense with worry, a heavy, fluid pain pumping up his leg with every step. He fought against a growing sense of desperation.

Then he saw the gate.

It was two carriages wide, and flanked by brick pillars topped with sculptures of bronze. One statue depicted a bear wrestling with a mountain lion, the other a horse on its hind legs, an expression blending rage and fear skillfully wrought on its features. The surface of the bronze glowed in the sunlight, yet the statues were far from new, for the mottled verdigris of age had taken root in the metal's deeper folds.

The gate--a handsome, massive panel of wrought iron--was open; a dusty track, free of overgrowth, led inward. The Major swore with surprise, then retracted the oath out of gratitude; whatever lay beyond that gate, its openness was, for him, a God-sent invitation. Warily, the saddle bag over his truncated left arm and the pistol butt close to his good right hand, he stepped through.

Just beyond the gate, a canopy of trees gave shade to a wide carriage-way that split into two halves of a circle. In the center of this loomed another statue, large and heroically-proportioned, but decidedly whimsical compared to the conventional designs that topped the entrance pillars. This sculpture depicted a Pan-like figure riding on the back of a leaping frog, complete with an elegant saddle. The goat-man's face was twisted with glee; there was a sensualist's leer suggested by the angle of the mouth, and the bronze eyes were slanted and deep-set under a metallic cap of curls. There was an impressive pagan vitality about the figure, but the feelings it aroused in the Major were ambiguous, and he wondered at the sensibility of the owner placing it here, at the very gateway to his estate.

Walking around the statue's base, to the point where the circle halves rejoined to form a wide, neatly pebbled driveway, the Major was impressed by the vista that greeted his sight. Ahead stretched an avenue of mammoth oaks--titanic trees whose girth was greater than a man might measure with both arms outstretched. Moss laced with sunlight depended from the trees like curtains of pale embroidery. At the end of the tunnel formed by the trees, perhaps a quarter of a mile away, he could see a proliferation of color--a garden, perhaps?--and beyond that, the capitols and eaves of a lofty, column-fronted house.

As the Major walked farther down that noble avenue, he saw that a vast and intricate garden did indeed occupy the land behind the monumental oaks. He glimpsed ornate, finely-trimmed mazes of shrubbery, alternating with cunningly symmetrical splashes of semi-tropical plants, all in a greater profusion of kinds and colors than he had ever seen before in one place; for sheer baroque extravagance, these gardens surpassed even the famed arborea of Wilmington. Lavish and seductive, a hundred scents came to his nostrils as he walked. He crossed regularly through invisible streams of gardenia smell--heavy as syrup, narcotically ripe--which ran through the other, more delicate scents like a recurring melody through a work of music.

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## THE SIREN OF SWANQUARTER

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At the termination of the avenue of oaks, the Major stopped and surveyed the imposing house: two elevated stories of red brick above a ground floor of polished stone, majestic white columns that glowed in the sun, the whole accented by a sweeping wrought-iron staircase. The front doors were shut, and adorned with bronze clappers whose workmanship seemed to be in the same style as the sculptures he had passed earlier. Thus far, the Major had not seen a living soul, although from the scope and condition of the landscaping, the estate obviously boasted a large staff of servants. He straightened himself, resolved to present the most dignified picture he could, and cleared his throat of the dust which had settled there.

At the sound of his cough, from behind a waist-high row of shrubs, a Negro manservant popped into view like a large ebony rabbit. The man was the color of polished teak, glistening from the heat and from his own exertions. He carried loam-encrusted garden tools and his clothes, while clean enough, were curiously frilly and old-fashioned, suggestive of colonial times.

"Good day to you sir," said the black.

"Good day. I'm bound for Charleston and have had an accident which cost me my horse. I'd be obliged if your master could shelter me for the night and perhaps allow me to purchase a fresh mount from his stables."

The black man appraised him with eyes as expressionless and glossy as the eyes of the bronze Pan at the entrance. When he spoke again, the Major was surprised to detect a French accent.

"Please wait here, monsieur, and I will bring the master to meet you."

The servant strode off toward a walled enclosure of considerable size that seemed to be the focal point of the garden paths. Five minutes went by; the Major shifted on his feet and listened to the drowse of pollen-drunk bees. At length, he heard a rhythmic, rolling sound and saw the servant pushing toward him a man in a wicker wheelchair.

The man was clad in a dressing gown whose former elegance was compromised by the stains and rents of some sort of intense labor. His face was broad and heavy-jowled; his mouth was wide with lips too fleshy to be considered sensual; a broad flat nose and ponderous jaw were, to a certain extent, offset by a carefully tended mustache and goatee. His torso and shoulders were broad and muscular to the point of exaggeration, in contrast to his narrow hips. From the waist down, he was covered by a lap robe. As the wheelchair drew near, his hitherto immobile features relaxed into a smile, and he greeted the Major with a handclasp of crushing power.

"I am Phillipe Mauriac. Welcome to Swanquarter... Major? It is a major's rank, there beneath the dust, is it not? I thought so. Latouche has explained your predicament to me; it is most unfortunate. Still, we can make the best of it--we have received no visitors here for so long that it will be rare pleasure to extend hospitality. I'm sorry it took so long for me to greet you, but I was working on a delicate part of a statue when Latouche found me, and I had to finish the business or risk losing the entire casting. Do forgive me." He turned to face the servant. "Latouche, please draw a bath for

the Major, in the main guest room."

Bowing twice, the servant departed into the main house.

"You are the sculptor, then, whose work adorns the entrance-way? I compliment you, sir; it is vigorous and full of vitality."

"You are kind, Major, and obviously a man of some discrimination. But no, those pieces are my father's work. I inherited only a fraction of his abilities, and my affliction prevents me from working on the heroic scale that he preferred. My own pieces are smaller affairs, and far more private in nature."

"Still, I should like to see them."

"Perhaps you shall. But now, you have had an arduous journey and I feel that further conversation should wait until you've had a chance to recover from its effects. You will find your room at the top of the staircase, off to the right. Bathe off the dust, refresh yourself, and join us for dinner in--shall we say one hour?"

The Major wondered who else might be present, but the promise of a bath dominated his thoughts almost entirely. He scarcely glanced at the mahogany, gold, and crystal as he made his way through the richly furnished hall, up the carpeted stairs and into the designated room. There he found a steaming tub, fresh linen, and the servant Latouche, who took his dusty uniform and laid out a set of dinner clothes before retiring.

The bath felt exquisite; the Major lay in the tub until the water cooled. When he emerged to dress, he found a decanter of sherry on the bedside table. Beside the glass lay a single rose, so dark, so velvety, that it almost shadowed over from crimson to purple. A greeting card bore the single word: "Welcome" in an elegant and almost certainly feminine hand.

While the Major dressed, he reflected on his good fortune in finding such a plantation in the middle of a wilderness whose only inhabitants were supposed to be half-wild negroes. Relaxed by the bath, stimulated by the sherry, he resolved, if his host were agreeable, to stay at least another night--the war could continue without him for a while; besides it would have taken him another two or three days to walk out of Altamahaw County, had he not found this oasis. Already, the frightening encounter of the night before--which had an air of unreality to it even as it was happening--seemed far away.

Latouche escorted him down to the dining room, where rubbed woods and polished silver glowed in the light of the candelabra. At a sectioned dining table which might once have seated twenty, three places were set. Mauriac had been wheeled to the central place, at the table's end. He greeted the Major warmly and indicated the chair on his left. No soon had the Major taken his seat than the entrance of a young woman caused him to rise again.

"Permit me to introduce my sister, Anne-Marie."

"Major, this is a pleasing occasion--we've not had a guest at Swanquarter for much too long. I hope you enjoyed the sherry...and the rose."

These things were said with a directness, an avoidance of flirtation, that invited a kindred response. "The sherry was delicious; the rose was beautiful--although it pales in comparison with the lady who bestowed it."



Anne-Marie inclined her head graciously at the compliment and seated herself with a rustle of crinolines. The Major had but spoken the truth, for her beauty had struck him like a physical blow: features which were exaggerated--almost to the point of degeneracy--in her brother, were refined to perfection in her face. Her skin was porcelain, her mouth full and expressive, her profile strong and characterful; her hair, worn long and permitted to flow in natural curves, was glossy, blue-black as the leaves of a raven's breast, and barely tamed. As she turned her head, it moved in sensuous harmony with the shadowed hollows of her throat and shoulders. Her eyes were at first disconcerting, but undeniably striking in their ultimate declaration of beauty: thin, vivid rings of dark blue encircling large, black, liquid irises which seemed rarely to change size in adjustment to light. The Major found their gaze compelling, and when he returned to it, as he did with increasing frequency, the rest of the room seemed to recede as though behind a dim, vibrating film.

Latouche served the meal from a cart, decanting an excellent wine to go with it. The Major noticed that Mauriac did not share the dishes that passed in handsome array across his and the lady's plate, but rather picked sparingly at thin strips of what appeared to be raw fish, and spooned dollops of straw-colored soup from a small silver tureen.

For a time, there was discussion of the war and of the South's declining fortunes. The Major had long ago lost the desire to talk about battle, but he found that the tightness, the reserve, which had locked itself around his heart after the shock of his wound, seemed now to have departed his breast. He had, after all, seen the making of much history, had seen the legendary Longstreet riding through the smoke of his own battery at the climax of one of the last great southern victories. He told them of these things now, and felt as he did so, a lightening of spirit that came from more than just the wine. When the lady, with a motion as natural as it was diffident, came around the table and assisted him in cutting his portion of meat, he took no offense; indeed, he savored that moment of pampering more than he would have thought possible.

"But all these military matters must be tiresome to you, Mr. Mauriac. The war seems very remote from this place."

"On the contrary, Major," replied Mauriac, "the war is very much on our minds. My affliction prevents me from serving as you have done, but my contribution to the southern cause has been far from negligible. Our rice crops have been sold in foreign lands in exchange for military supplies; I have agents in several Caribbean ports, and until last winter, my blockade runners enjoyed considerable success--a situation which no longer holds true, alas."

"Your crops have been good?"

"Abundant beyond our needs, and far beyond our ability to distribute to such local markets as may still exist."

The Major sipped wine. His gaze was drawn, over the shining rim of the goblet, to the blue-circled ebony pools of Anne-Marie's eyes.

"I wonder at one thing, though, Mauriac--why has this region fallen into such abandon? Your own estate is ample proof that it can be the basis of prosperity, yet in all the miles I've traveled since crossing the Uhwarrie, this is the first in-

habited place I've seen."

"Most of the large farms have failed, Major. There is plenty of fecund land in Altamahaw County, but it lies part and parcel of a soil that is, to varying degrees, swamp and forest, saltwater and fresh, grasslands and sand dunes. The very geographical shape of the land changes, annually, extensively, and unpredictably. The land here, Major, has cycles rather than seasons. It requires patience to learn those cycles, and generations of time. If you learn the secrets of the land and the water, they will reward you generously. But you must never try to impose a man-made scheme upon them, not until after you have learned to act in harmony with them. On your way here from the river, you passed the sites of a dozen once-great plantations. Nothing remains of them now save ruins falling into the swamps. All were built by proud men who thought they could dominate this land according to their private time-tables."

"Your family has dwelt here for a long time, then?"

"Yes," answered Anne-Marie. "For nearly two centuries. Not always on this site and not always in this house, which our father built in the prime of his life. The Altamahaw Indians were still a cohesive tribe when the first Mauriacs arrived--that's how long ago it was."

"I didn't know the county was named for Indians; what happened to them?"

"They were not a large tribe to begin with, and their customs were so singular that persecution was their inevitable lot. By the time of the Revolution, the tribe's few wretched survivors had intermarried with blacks and the bloodline had started to degenerate. Now, they are beyond all recognition as a tribe. We can sympathize with their fate--it might have been our own, had we not settled in this region."

"I'm not sure I understand you, mademoiselle...."

Mauriac interrupted his sister with a restrained but forceful gesture. "Our family was driven from one of the New England colonies by religious persecution. A storm drove their ship aground on one of the outer banks, and *voila*, we remain, two-hundred years later."

Mauriac sipped his wine before continuing, assuming a more conversational tone: "This part of the coast, Major, has been a haven for Spaniards and Dutchmen, for pirates and planters and rebellious slaves, for Haitian revolutionaries and African witch doctors--all have washed upon its shores and all have in turn been absorbed by the land. It seems probable that we, too, shall follow them."

Mauriac's words were spoken quietly, but were unmistakably bleak in nuance. To lighten the mood, the Major turned the conversation to a purely external subject.

"May I ask if you have ever been troubled by the local wildlife?"

Mauriac tilted his head as though examining the question against the light of the chandelier. "One sees a snake from time to time, of course, and there are places in the river where it's best to leave the alligators alone, but other than that, nothing to speak of."

"I was referring to wildcats. I'm convinced that it was such an animal that attacked my camp last night and killed my horse. Can it only have been last night? It seems so long

ago...."

"Did you get a good look at the beast?"

"No. It happened very quickly and the light was poor. But what else could it have been?"

"Come to think of it," said Anne-Marie brightly, "our father used to tell about a large bobcat that occasionally bothered the blacks, out on the edge of the rice fields. That was when we were still children, so of course it could hardly be the same animal. Still, if there was one, why not another? But relax, Major--I promise I won't let it into the house!"

There was much laughter, as the dinner ended, and the long-unfamiliar sensations of it rode the wine giddily into the Major's bloodstream. The incident of the night before now seemed very far away indeed.

After dinner, in the library, Anne-Marie played Stamitz, Haydn and a medley of gay salon music on a pianoforte that would not have disgraced a European drawing room. As the final notes of the last quadrille died away on the warm fragrant air that poured in from the garden, Mauriac palmed back a yawn.

"The stimulation of good company has tired me, Major. Please excuse me if I retire early and leave you in the care of my sister. Anne-Marie, why don't you offer the Major some of our good brandy and then perhaps show him the rice fields--there is a waxing moon tonight, and the view is impressive under such conditions."

After Mauriac was gone, Anne-Marie opened a breakfront cabinet and poured a generous portion of amber liquid from a decanter resting there. "Try this, Major--authentic Napoleonic brandy. The last

bottle of it, I dare say, between here and Richmond."

"It sounds like something that should be contemplated, rather than consumed," the Major replied. Nonetheless, he accepted the glass and drank. The brandy had a bouquet that spoke of state dinners and a potency that was not totally masked by its smoothness.

"This is magnificent."

"So is the view from the terrace balustrade--will you walk with me?"

Again, with a naturalness that precluded the possibility of offense, she moved beside him and took his arm--the left one, so that he might clasp the brandy with his remaining hand. As the drink spread a pool of well-being through his body, a fire that soothed then ultimately caressed, he was led through French doors to a broad flagstone terrace that wound around the house and eventually led out onto a broad veranda whose marble balustrade overlooked a splendid vista.

Spread out before them like a vast checkerboard, extending to a horizon of distant, bearded oaks, were miles of rice fields, walled off from the main channels by massive dikes. Behind the dikes, the fields were indented at regular intervals by irrigation creeks whose surfaces were silvered by moonlight. Between the elevation where they stood, and the boundaries of the rice fields, curved a placid, lagoon-like body of

water bordered by cypresses. A cool, fragrant breeze came to them from the water.

"It's like a dream," the Major said, following a peaceful silence during which she had watched while his eyes drank in the scene. "I can imagine what it looked like before the war."

An earthen causeway, wide enough for wagon traffic in both directions, issued from a terraced landing below their vantage point; at its far end were docks and sheds where, in more prosperous times, commercial vessels must have loaded rice and discharged cargo.

Anne-Marie pointed. "The channel is deep enough for sea-going vessels. It empties into the upper Coosawatchie about three miles beyond that tree line."

"The land looks well-kept. You must have a great many field hands."

"Enough to get by--the slave quarters are some distance from the house, in the woods beyond the gardens. Father did not want anything unseemly to spoil the design of Swanquarter."

"That is a lovely name," said the Major. "Where does it come from?"

Her smile was brushed by moonlight; gems of it flashed in the depths of her eyes. "Look, just where I'm pointing, and you'll see why."

He had not noticed them until now, for they were as dark as the water in which they floated--a formation of swans, black as ebonite, arrayed in a precise wedge. The Major was struck by their immense size, their uniform coloration, and by the utter silence of their passage. Trailing behind the birds, overlapping V's of wake spread out

soundlessly, bending the bars of moonlight. As the birds came abreast, their eyes seemed to glow. Then they passed on, in total silence, and melted into the darkness.

What other things the Major and the woman spoke about, he could not later recall. An unmeasured period of time passed, during which he was conscious only of her closeness, the primordial beauty of the night, and the scent that emanated from her moon-glossed hair--a perfume that seemed to suggest the essence of all the flowers that grew around them in such extravagant yet disciplined profusion.

Soon, however, a warm drowsiness overcame him, and he was compelled to retire. His sleep was profound.

It was late morning when he awoke to the sound of discreet knocking. Latouche bowed when the door was opened and said, "Mademoiselle Anne-Marie wishes to know if you would care to join her for breakfast on the eastern veranda."

"Tell the mademoiselle that I shall be delighted to do so."

"Of course, monsieur. Here is your uniform, cleaned and pressed."

The Major took the uniform, marveled that it had been possible to get the threadbare material so clean, then hung it in a wardrobe and attired himself in the crisp civilian clothes that had been made available to him. He would not, he decid-

**...She possessed not only outward beauty, but inward sensitivity as well; and beneath these things, there was an exotic, undefinable quality that disturbed the air around her; a hint of mystery, wrapped in a suggestion of melancholy.**



ed, put on that uniform again until it was time for him to go back to the war. Not yet, not yet....

And indeed, the first topic of conversation between himself and the young woman was the duration of his stay; she extended an unlimited invitation, and he gladly accepted--a few more days without his services would not seriously jeopardize the coastal defenses of Charleston.

Starting with that lazy, summery breakfast, the next three days were an idyll for the Major. He discovered in Anne-Marie a woman of vivacity and intelligence, a woman who brought to life in him qualities which he thought the war had scourged from his being. She possessed not only outward beauty, but inward sensitivity as well; and beneath these things, there was an exotic, undefinable quality that disturbed the air around her; a hint of mystery, wrapped in a suggestion of melancholy.

They wandered through the gardens together, arm in arm from the start, hand in hand by the end of the that first day. They strolled down the avenue of great oaks, they explored the volumes in the library, and in the evenings, Anne-Marie played music. Each night, following that joyful interlude, the Major took a glass of the prized brandy and escorted her on a last moonlit stroll overlooking the rice fields and the river.

By the end of the first day, as he succumbed to the languor that seemed to settle over him after their walk together, the Major realized that he had fallen in love with Anne-Marie. By the end of the third day, as she stepped proudly into his arms and they kissed in the scented moonlight, he dared to believe that his emotions were reciprocated.

After lunch on the fourth day, he proposed to her. She accepted.

In a rush of excitement, he spoke of the future's plans. "It will not be a long engagement--the war cannot last much beyond the new year--and when it's over, I'll return with a fine carriage and a preacher!"

The color of Anne-Marie's face changed as though she had been struck across the cheek.

"I don't understand, my love. Why do you speak of waiting for so long?"

"Anne-Marie, please understand. If I do not go to Charleston, as I was ordered to do, I'll be a deserter. I am still an officer in the Confederate Army, and I must put that duty first until the South has no more need of me as a soldier.

Nor can I take you to Charleston with me--it is probable that the city itself will be invested and I will never forgive myself if you were subject to the horrors of a siege. You and your brother will be safer here, safer by far."

"But the war might drag on...for years!"

The Major shook his head sadly. "No, it will not. I have seen with my own eyes how little the South has left to fight with. In any case, I have no choice to go on until I am honorably discharged."

"Or killed!" she snapped, "Or until you lose a leg as well as an arm!" A series of violent emotions succeeded one another on her face: regret at her own words, anger at the intrusion of outside reality, and a look of panic whose presence mystified the Major. Her eyes brimmed with tears, she uttered

a small cry behind clasped hands, something between a wail and a growl, then turned and fled the house.

For a time, the Major sat disconsolately on a bench in the garden. He cursed his own sense of duty. Had he not given the South enough? And here, in this strangely untouched place, where not only the war but time itself seemed to be suspended, the South had placed a treasure within his reach. Must he leave it behind now?

Having wakened the spirit of duty within himself, he now found it impossible to put it back to sleep. He would locate the horses, select one, and make his preparations for leaving. If Anne-Marie truly loved him as much as she protested, she would come to understand that he could not take any other course without compromising his honor as an officer.

For the next hour, the Major explored the farther reaches of the grounds. Finally, in the forest behind the walls of Philippe Mauriac's sculpture garden, he found a spacious stable. There was not a single horse within its stalls, but from the smell of it, the building had contained animals not too long before.

Puzzled, the Major made his way back toward the main house, skirting the walls of the sculpture garden. He would simply have to ask Mauriac, point-blank, where the horses were. The necessity of doing that, contrasted to the hospitality, even intimacy, that he had enjoyed since his arrival, troubled him deeply.

He was walking past the blank, unpierced gate of the sculpture garden when he heard voices, startlingly close: Anne-Marie's and her brother's, along with the underlying



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rasp of the wheelchair moving along the path. Embarrassed at the thought of suddenly confronting them, the Major sought to conceal himself until they had passed. Seeing no other place he might reach without detection--already he could discern her dress through the foliage--he acted without premeditation: he tried the gates of the garden, found that one of the panels was unlocked, and slipped inside, into the shadows beneath a vine-shrouded trellis. There he stood, heart pounding with conflicting emotions, his face pressed against the gate's inner surface.

"It must be tonight!" came the insistent voice of Phillipe Mauriac. "Before he becomes suspicious. Make sure he drinks the brandy early in the evening."

"What if he tries to leave this afternoon?"

"How can he? Latouche has hidden the horses and I doubt that the Major would be able to resume his journey on foot. Not after his experience in the pine-barrens."

"No, he must not try to leave here on foot, Phillipe; there are too many dangers! I truly love him, and it would kill me if he were hurt again. His coming here was the work of destiny, and I will be wed to him!"

"It was in view of that possibility, my dear, that his life was spared. I pray, for your sake, that his love for you will enable him to understand, in time, the way things are with us, and why we must do what must be done."

The voices receded beyond audibility.

The Major pressed his face to the cool metal of the gate, his ears throbbing with the strain of listening, his brain racked by feverish conflict. He had found no horses because the horses had been hidden. From him. In order to keep him here. Until...*something* happened to him. But what? And what had taken place on the other nights, after he had consumed the brandy which he now knew to have been drugged?

At the same time, beneath the knifelike twist of sorrow and the beating wings of apprehension, he rejoiced to hear Anne-Marie's love for him confirmed from her own lips. Surely, she could not plan for harm to come to him, not after the feelings she had voiced. The Major breathed deeply, seeking to master the confused torrent flooding through his mind. His course seemed resolved: he would leave not this afternoon, but tonight, when they thought him deep in a narcotic slumber. If he could not find a horse, then he would make do with a boat. Later, when the war was over, he would return for Anne-Marie, and no doubt all of his questions would find acceptable answers.

Relieved to have a plan of action, the Major straightened and, as he did so, turned toward the interior of the garden. And groaned aloud when he beheld the leering, blasphemous figure that squatted, a knot of contorted bronze, on a pedestal only a foot from his eyes.

The creature was like nothing the Major had ever seen before: amphibian, yet feral too, with splayed webbed legs and powerful, wiry, claw-tipped arms; the wide flat head was suggestive of both a frog and an otter, yet plainly it was neither. The alienness of the beast was repellant, yet Mauriac had sculpted it in a heroic pose, up on its hind legs, locked in a killing embrace with a full grown alligator.

Trellised vines gave thick shade to the sculpture garden.

The canopy of leaves was artfully trimmed so that beams of thick coastal sunlight pierced the arboreal gloom at regular intervals. Within each of these shafts of light, as though by theatrical design, a pedestal-mounted sculpture basked in the heat. Each statue was different, but a recurring theme was the appearance of another of those singular creatures--some depicted with their bestial qualities grotesquely exaggerated, others with these same features muted, softened, given an almost human aspect.

The Major inspected this bizarre gallery with growing apprehension. Was Mauriac's affliction more than physical?--for these grotesques could only have been the product of a morbid, unhealthy imagination, one obsessed with shapes that were never intended to occur in nature.

After a while, the Major forced himself to turn around--to go deeper into those sinister bowers, to linger in that thick, scented, cloying shade, was to risk discovery by the sculptor himself. As he turned to leave, however, his eye was drawn toward a work-in-progress that occupied a niche beside the wall. The piece was covered with a damp cheesecloth; the pedestal was littered with wood and metal implements caked with dried clay. On impulse, the Major lifted the covering and beheld...himself. Himself in full uniform, in the stiff, self-consciously heroic pose of a *Harper's Weekly* drawing. A mass of unfinished clay stood beside his figure, and the few rough marks that had been scored upon the material were hideously suggestive of the obscene figures whose acquaintance he had already made throughout the garden.

He fled the place. Then he walked aimlessly in the outer gardens until his inner sense of discipline reasserted itself. He then forced himself to walk more slowly, to assume a casual and melancholy appearance--the aspect of a troubled lover--in case any unseen eyes might be watching his progress. Gradually he steered a course for the riverbank and finally, still with studied casualness, he strode out onto the causeway. He stepped behind the cluster of dockside buildings, where he could not be seen from the shore.

The doors to the shed were not locked. Inside the first, he found nothing but sacks of rice. Inside the next structure, he discovered a pirogue drawn up on skids. The boat was old, but it seemed serviceable and its flat bottom would be ideal for navigating the swampy channels between here and the main waters of the Coosawatchie; once there, he reasoned, the seaward current would eventually carry him to civilization. There were oars already in the boat; he further provisioned the craft with a few lengths of rope and a lantern. Hardtack and a full canteen, he would bring tonight.

He worked quickly, so that if anyone had seen him step around the hidden side of the buildings, he would not appear to have been gone long enough to accomplish more than a casual inspection. Back outside, he sought to reinforce that impression by dawdling against a tree and staring moodily out over the rice fields.

In truth, the calm image he presented was in total contrast to his emotions. Now that his idyll had been shattered, his suspicions--though of what, precisely, he could not say--made him prey to a whole new set of disturbing perceptions about Swanquarter, matters of which he had only been dimly



conscious, so crowded out had they been by the sensual drowse of the time he had spent in Anne-Marie's company.

A plantation the size of Swanquarter could not be maintained without a large staff of servants--the gardens alone would have required the full attention of half a dozen skilled laborers. Yet, in all the time he had been here, he had seen only Latouche; not once had he glimpsed another slave. Even if the servants' quarters were some distance away from the big house, he should at least have heard a baby's cry; yet there was nothing but hot, heavy silence from the woods beyond the garden's edge.

Even as these thoughts tumbled through his mind, the Major noticed that a large area of the rice field nearest the channel had been cleared, and a sagging portion of the dike wall mended, since he had last looked upon them a day or two before. The accomplished labor was obviously the work of a sizable field crew, yet he had seen no one in those fields since he had first set eyes on them. He could draw no conclusions from these speculations, but their appearance alone deepened his sense of unease to an almost morbid degree.

Supper was both forced and casual. There was a brittleness to Anne-Marie's smile when she announced, both to the Major and to her brother, that she had agreed to marry him "after the war." The Major controlled the joy that this declaration would have otherwise brought to his heart--he suspected that it was intended only to lull him, to allay any suspicions he might have. Phillipe Mauriac feigned great pleasure at the announcement, toasted the couple with wine, then excused himself early, in order that the betrothed couple might enjoy one another's company.

Anne-Marie played for the Major after dinner, played with an eloquence that stabbed his heart. Finished, she turned to him with a sad smile, her eyes large and radiant with darkness: "You'll wish to leave tomorrow, my darling." Her tone was one of sad acquiescence to the inevitable.

"I must."

"Will you have a last glass of brandy with me?"

The Major tensed; he measured his reply carefully: "Yes, dearest, if you will walk with me one last time by the river."

While she was pointing out the swans to him, he poured the brandy into a flowerbed, then lifted the empty glass to his lips and wetted them slightly with the last drops, so that would seem to have been drinking it when she kissed him. And she did kiss him, often, with an unfeigned passion that tore at him. Never had he held such a woman, never had he longed so to drown his personal fate in union with another. Yet he must leave her at the very hour of his greatest desire for her.

After a suitable interval, the Major manifested the now-customary signs of drowsiness and walked back to the main house. He bid her goodnight in the upstairs hall, kissed her one final time, and closed the bedroom door. He listened as she retreated down the hall, into her own room. The house grew quiet.

He donned his uniform and belted his holster. He had to make his move to the boathouse soon, before his hosts put into motion their own plans for the evening. He waited almost half an hour, heard nothing, then went to the window and opened it to its widest extent. There was a wrought-iron trellis

within reach, leading downward to the veranda. The climb was difficult and he was forced to use his amputated arm as a kind of lever. It was a painful and excruciatingly slow method of locomotion, but the footholds were secure and after a time, he stood once more on flagstones.

Keeping to the shadows at the side of the house, the Major worked his way slowly in the direction of the river. The myriad insect sounds from the garden masked any slight noise he made and he began to breathe more easily as he rounded the final corner between himself and the steps leading to the causeway.

He froze as he saw Phillipe Mauriac hunched over in his wheelchair, positioned near those same steps. Mauriac's back was turned; he seemed lost in thought, possibly asleep, for the moonlight showed him bent forward, his head low. The Major stepped gently now--he could perhaps sneak past the man's back. His foot, however, descended upon the carapace of a nocturnal beetle and the resulting "crunch" was like a gunshot.

Without turning around, Mauriac quietly said, "Good evening, Major. I am sorry you chose to leave this way, like a thief in the night. Has our hospitality not been sufficient?"

"It has been very generous, Mauriac--including the drugged brandy."

"Ah. I regret that, believe me, but it was necessary."

"And was it necessary to plan to keep me here against my will?"

"A man's will changes, Major, as his knowledge increases." Mauriac still faced away from him; the Major edged forward until he stood within sprinting distance of the causeway steps. Years of martial habit had drawn his good hand down to the flap of his holster.

Mauriac spoke again, and as he did so, the Major became cognizant of a change in his voice--it seemed thickened, distorted, as though the words were being forced up through a vocal apparatus clogged with fluid.

"Do you love my sister, Major? Do you love her truly and deeply enough to blend your destiny with hers? For I can assure you that her love for you is just that great."

"Then it will endure a little longer, until my duty is completed and the war is over."

Mauriac sighed; the sadness in that sound was not a sham. "To wait, Major, is to risk a great deal. Once, we were a large and vital family--except for the fact that, at rare intervals, every two or three generations, a terrible disease surfaced in our blood. A disease that causes...changes in the body's chemistry. Its appearance at a time and in a social milieu which made it impossible to hide, caused our expulsion from New England. Soon after the Mauriacs established themselves in the Altamahaw region, the incidence of this dread affliction increased. Increased almost in direct proportion to our prosperity. Until now. I am the last male representative of my line, and as you must have already surmised, it is not possible for me to continue the lineage. My sister must produce an heir, and it must be within the span of two years, three at the most; after that, she will no longer be fertile."

"Am I a stud bull, Mauriac, that you should speak of these intimate matters so callously?"

"Damn your milk-fed sensibilities! I'm speaking of the preservation of my family's very name! There are things at stake here, things involved with these 'intimate' matters, which you cannot possibly understand yet. But I beg of you, if you love my sister, stay and be wedded to her now, and I promise you--I promise you!--power and wealth and freedom beyond anything you have ever dreamed!"

"I have seen the demons in your sculpture garden, Mauriac. You are a disturbed man, and when I return to claim Anne-Marie after the war, I will bring the best doctor I can find to assist you. But I am resolved to leave this place tonight, and I beg of you, in the name of the love I bear for your sister, do not try to stop me."

"I am sorry, Major, but I think that, even in my injured condition, I might still be able to stop you."

The Major leaped down the stairs, even as Mauriac's wheelchair fell to one side and its occupant leaped across a wide expanse of terrace. The Major's mind almost refused to accept what his eyes told him: that he had seen a similar leap before, from approximately the same distance and angle, at the moment of waking nightmare in the pine-barrens. As the creature which had been speaking in a parody of Mauriac's voice croaked and flapped and whistled to a standing position, the Major saw a bandage fall from its glistening flat-muscled leg--a white bird fluttering in the moonlight--to reveal the still-raw flesh wound that pierced the right thigh; a wound which he quickly identified as one that had been inflicted by a .44 caliber pistol ball. The injured leg buckled under the thing and it hammered the flagstones in rage and frustration, bellowing its anger in a voice that no longer even pretended to come from a human throat.

Fear and revulsion made the Major raise his pistol and aim at the convulsing shadow scrabbling for its footing on the terrace above him; pity froze his finger on the trigger. He turned and ran, no longer sure of his own sanity, seeking only to escape.

As the flat-bottomed boat drifted from the dock into clear water, the Major lay motionless for an instant, sobbing for breath. Behind him, he heard the wet flop of something dragging itself down the stairs to the causeway.

Using his good hand to remove the oar, bracing painfully with his stump, he managed to get some headway out in the channel. When he felt the current moving the boat, he ceased rowing and watched the lights of Swanquarter grow distant. He was almost thrown from the boat when it drifted into one of the rice field dikes. Cursing, the Major swung around and braced an oar against the earthen wall.

Suddenly, he stopped moving; he stared, his breath caught. Before him in the moonlight, as far as he could see, the rice fields were stippled with figures. Rows of men and women worked the fields, bent low in silent labor, irrigating, seeding, repairing the dikes. No songs, no laughter, no curses broke that awful stillness; only the chuff and scrape of tools in the nocturnal earth. The inexplicable, unnatural silence pushed the Major's mind in the direction of madness; here was a blasphemy, he was certain, beyond anything he had yet encountered.

Recoiling in horror, the Major pushed with the oar and

the boat shot into the channel and was caught again by the current. From the pool of darkness by the docks there sounded a splash, as of something large diving into the water. The Major had no thought now other than to escape the pursuit that might have been signaled by that sound. Using teeth as well as fingers, he lashed the end of the second oar to the stump of his left hand and was thereby able to gain some slight additional measure of speed and control. He maneuvered into the center of the channel, as the last of the plantation's gardens swept by on his left side, replaced by a wall of blank forest. The rice fields and their hideously silent work-crews gradually receded on his right side, the irrigation ditches now becoming tributary creeks fired with a glaze of moonlight.

He had gone perhaps a mile when he heard the steady rhythmic splashing in the darkness behind him. The voice was clear across the water, although the timbre of it was changed: thickened, clotted, as though each word had to be forced out through a film of water.

"Come back my love, do not leave me!"

At the sound of that voice, the Major's skin crawled; a voice at once so familiar and beloved, yet now so distorted with change. He rowed until the stump of his left hand grew raw and bloody. Gradually, the calling voice seemed to recede, though its words still floated clearly over the water.

"Our love is a destiny--you cannot escape it any more than I can let you go. In time you would understand, my darling, and with me you can share a life that is wilder, grander, and more free than anything you can conceive of!"

Ahead, the moonlight was interrupted by a streak of shadow--a sandbar that blocked part of the channel. Beyond it, the water opened into a broad, swift river--a vision of safety to the Major's now-fevered senses.

"Do not go near the sandbar!" the voice cried, closer now. "There is great danger there! Wait for me, please wait for me!"

There was a sudden loud thrashing in the water in front of the boat--foam curdled the moonlight near the sandbar. The keel of the boat scraped across something rough and hard. Trembling, the Major raised the lantern, uncovered it, and held it out over the bow.

In a circle of great black wedges, their eyes yellow and unblinking, a pack of alligators had arrayed themselves in front of him. Their leader, a scarred old bull fifteen feet in length, opened his nightmarish jaws and hissed. The Major gagged on the wet, red foetus that wafted to his nostrils from the monster's mouth.

From the darkness behind him, startlingly close at hand, came words in a tongue the Major could not understand: thick, crawling syllables, slow and liquid and unmistakably commanding. The semi-circle of reptiles blinked, then sank beneath the surface and retreated to the sandbar, where they dug into the mud and stared at him, their eyes, glowing like old coins, just touched by the lantern's perimeter of light. The boat drifted sideways toward the end of the sandbar.

The Major raised the lantern as high as he could and peered at the water behind him. Something white, blurred by water and darkness, fluttered just out of the reach of the light.

The voice, when it spoke again, was sad and quiet, resigned and certain.

"Go then, my love--into the river and back to your war. I give you your life, and I lay claim on your heart in return. Come back to me, and we will swim together in the moonlight...."

The voice did not speak again. The Major's boat rounded the sandbar and drifted into the main currents of the Coosawatchie. A day and half later, he reached the coastal village of the same name, and four days after that he reported for duty in Charleston.

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OUR TRAIN RATTLED on through the darkness. We had just about finished the whiskey. The Major lapsed into a forlorn and brooding silence.

We were passing along an especially rough section of track when the headlight's glow started appearing in the blackwater that lapped close to the rail bed on our right side. The light seemed to be sucked deep into the water, whose boundaries and configuration were not visible. I slowed the train to a snail's pace in case some of the tracks were flooded.

The water slid past for miles, unbroken by land or vegetation--we might as well have been traveling on rails laid across a dead sea. It was near midnight when the Major spoke again.

"Did you hear that?" he said.

I had heard nothing except the sound of our wheels on the rails, and told him so.

"Out there, in the water," he said. He slid over to the door of the cab, grabbed the handrail and leaned out over the dark shining surface.

I warned him to come back in. The words were no sooner out of my mouth than he uttered a strangled cry: "Look there, in the water! Great God, she has come for me!" He reached for his pistol and as he did so, the engine shuddered over a bad piece of track. The sudden lurch caught the Major off balance. The last I saw of him, he was vainly trying to find a grip with the stump of his left arm--then he fell headlong from the train.

Before the screech of brakes covered all other noises, I heard a scream and the sound of violently disturbed water. We coasted to a stop a hundred yards down the track, and I turned out the four boys in the boxcar, armed myself and the fireman with axes, issued lanterns to everybody, and led a methodical search back down the tracks for a distance of two miles. We found not a trace of the Major.

We finished our run without further incident. We were one of the last Confederate trains to get to Fayetteville before the whole thing fell apart. Wilmington was abandoned without a fight on February 21, and the Yanks occupied it a few days later, sending a column inland to help Sherman once-and-for-all whip Joe Johnston. Sherman didn't need any help to do that.

When the war ended in April, I was still running local trains in the middle of North Carolina. In May, some attempt was made to get the main lines functioning again, if only to supply the Federal garrisons. Since the tracks were so busted up elsewhere, a decision was made to re-open the Wilming-

ton-Santee branch to full-time traffic. As luck would have it, I was engineer on the first train sent south on the same stretch of railroad I had traveled with the Major on that memorable winter night.

It was maybe two hours before dawn, and we were running past the same long stretch of high black water, when the fireman punched me in the ribs.

"Looke there at that Goddamned thing, would you!"

I followed his pointing finger toward the rippling crescent of reflected headlight. The train was moving slowly, as before, and the things in the water were moving swiftly and almost silently, and the water blurred their shape somewhat.

But I had enough of a look to last me: the powerful slender legs pumped and the webbed feet bit deep into the water--the massive torsos arched and fell with a kind of savage abandon; the other features were, as the Major had described, an unholy mingling of suggestions from several species. I was vouchsafed only the most fleeting glimpse of the fore-parts of their bodies, but beyond any doubt the left arm of the larger creature terminated in a stump. On the broad, otter-like face, the wide toad-mouth was curled back from double rows of teeth in what was either an expression of immeasurable horror, or a rictus of Dionysian joy.

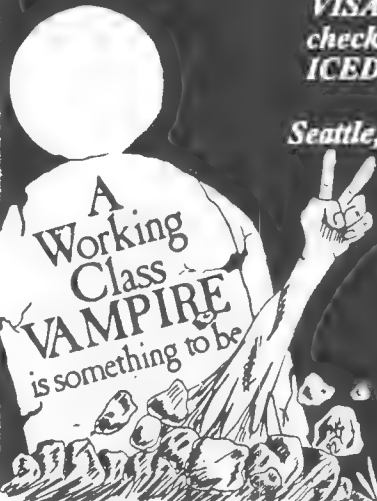
Early that summer, a big flood took out five miles of track, and to my knowledge, the line was never repaired.

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**Seattle Halloween 1967**

**"Not everything we put down  
stayed there."**

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# THE PRICE OF THE FLAMES

By Deidra Cox

JOHN SAW HIM just ahead, leaning against the mile marker and making no attempt to seek shelter from the rain. He slowed the Cadillac and considered the possibilities. Gnarled hands trembled briefly before steering to the shoulder. He pushed the passenger door open and watched the rain trail down the vinyl.

"Need a ride?" John asked.

A pair of cold blue eyes peered at him and John shivered. If the need hadn't been so strong, he would've left. Hit the gas and took off for greener pastures. But the need was a ravenous fire inside him, licking at his groin, so John stayed and tried not to weep.

After a slow shrug, the youth slithered into the car, making no apologies for the wet stains he made on the seat. They drove in silence, the boy giving no words of thanks. John stole a glance and began to sketch the unknown life.

Black hair was plastered to the boy's skull like matted weeds in a dead field. Average height. Impossibly thin. The outline of hungry ribs protruded from the ragged tee shirt. The young face was all angles and bones. A ripe odor flooded the car and John cracked his window.

"Been on the road long?"

"Fuck off."

John threw him a hard look, but said nothing. Anger poured from the youth in a chilling wave, filling the confined area with the scent. John gritted his teeth as his eyes wandered back to the boy. So young. So fresh and young.

"I just wondered where you're from," John said and licked his lips. "Where you're going?"

A muscle tensed in the youth's cheek, the violence lying close to the surface. A ripple of bittersweet pleasure moved in John. Good, he thought. That'll make it easier.

"My house isn't far from here if you'd like to change out of those wet clothes," John said. "You could catch a nasty cold if you stay in them much longer."

"Yeah? Then what?" The boy suddenly came to life, snapping forward and gripping the dash. "So, whattya get outta this?"

The air crackled with electricity and the only sound was the windshield wipers slapping against the glass. John exhaled slowly, anticipation swelling in his chest.

"Whatever you want to give."

The boy snorted and fell back into the seat. "Goddamn faggots."

An uneasy calm settled over the two. John watched the boy carefully, waiting for the attack and strangely disappointed when none came. The sour odor grew stronger and John pressed a little harder on the accelerator while keeping a wary

eye on the speedometer. Didn't want to attract the cops. Not at this stage of the game.

He hit the exit ramp with a strange sense of relief mixed with sad wonder. He turned to the boy. "Just a few minutes now. Then we'll be home."

The boy sneered. "Is Auntie Em and Dorothy gonna be there too, Pops?"

John paused, then continued, ignoring the thick sarcasm. "What's your name? I hate to keep calling you boy. That's not right."

An empty silence answered him.

"I'll tell you mine and you can tell me yours. I'm John Munroe."

The boy smiled. "Go to hell, John."

The words echoed in his head at a dizzying rate until he bit his tongue to stop the nervous chatter bubbling within.

Go to hell. Go to hell, John.

I've already been there, he thought. Many, many times.

A faint comfort eased over him when John saw the familiar markings of home. On either side of the road, vacant houses dotted the horizon in a thin, continuous line. Broken glass sparkled in the rain, sending jagged rainbows in the heavy liquid. Dead trees and brown grass adorned the landscape.

When had it happened? When did the people leave? Was it a gradual exodus or a massive evacuation?

He couldn't remember. No matter how hard he tried, John couldn't pull the memory from his brain. This was bad. Very bad, indeed.

He turned onto a deserted lane. The scenery was a repeat of the streets they'd drove by before. Nothing moved. Not even a stray dog. The absence of any living creatures gave the town an unnerving quality. A fact that wasn't lost upon John's guest.

"What the hell is this place?"

John smiled and parked in front of a darkened house, identical to all the others. The windows stared blankly at them like a blind man's eyes in the relentless rain.

"Welcome to Perdition," John said. "Surely you've heard of us. A few years ago we were almost famous as the town that was eating itself alive. Newspapers, television, radio. They all came to us, wanting a story."

He removed the keys from the ignition and stepped out from the car. After a moment's hesitation, the boy did the same. Sulfur, acid and burning, billowed in the wetness, assaulting the senses and leaving the boy slightly nauseated. An intricate web of glowing cracks worked across the ground beneath their feet. Rain sizzled and turned to steam, the heat rising like a cloud and choking them both with the bitter odor.

"Let's go inside," John said and motioned to the house. "You can change into some dry clothes."

They walked slowly, each eying the other for any sudden move. The porch sagged underneath their combined weight. "Don't worry, son," John said. "It's OK."

The door was unlocked as most were in Perdition. The need for safety long past. The living room floor was dusty, red mud caked across the threadbare rug.

Holding the door open, John watched the boy enter. He

## THE PRICE OF THE FLAMES

stiffened and waited for the oncoming attack. A knife was shoved against his neck, drawing a thin trickle of blood.

"Gimme the keys and your money, faggot," the boy hissed into his ear.

And so it begins, John thought and slammed his fist into the unprotected crotch. The knife fell to the floor as the boy collapsed, clutching his injured privates. A vicious chop to the back of the head spelled the end of any threat from him.

John looked down at the unconscious form lying in the dust. The excitement he'd felt earlier was gone, replaced by the weight of time and responsibility. He stared out a grimy window at the eternal rain, then proceeded to undress the boy.

Heat soaked into his skin as the boy slowly slipped to awareness. His eyes watered and he blinked to clear the stinging tears. The ground was hot under his buttocks and his hand scraped against a rock as he twisted around.

A red glow filled the room. No, he thought. I'm no longer in the house. He rolled to his side and nearly fell over the edge of a large break-off. His stomach lurched as he saw the river of molten lava flowing below. Flames licked along the surface, casting crimson shadows across the walls.

Crawling away, he scrambled to his knees and tried to stand. Flashes of light pierced his skull, causing him to stagger forward. A pair of strong hands helped him regain his balance, then lingered about his waist.

The boy jerked to one side, freeing himself from the clinging hands. John stood by him, the warm eyes locking with his. The old man was naked also, his shriveled sex hanging limply between his legs. A black strap encircled his right thigh and sheathed a large knife.

"They said we brought it upon ourselves," John said. "Digging the coal from the ground. Setting the explosives. Leaving the earth a hollow shell.

"But they were wrong. The flames were always with us. Since the beginning of time. Waiting for the proper sacrifice."

"You're ape shit, old man," the boy whispered. The knife called to him, promising freedom.

John smiled. "You're probably right. But what does sanity matter? What value does it hold? The flesh, the spirit. Only they have merit. The years come and go, but the soul lives on. Eternal. If you're willing to pay the price."

He paused and stretched out a hand to caress the boy's cheek. "What is your name? I've told you mine."

The boy swallowed hard and maintained a steady gaze. "Frog. My friends call me Frog."

He smiled at the old man and then, in one quick movement, lunged at the knife. Arching his wrist upward, the metal sank into the soft belly, making a sucking sound as the blade tore in the shrunken cavity.

Frog looked up at John, expecting to see the final throes of death written on his face. Instead, Frog received a startling revelation.

A joyous expression enveloped John's features, hinting of a rapture beyond human comprehension. Frog watched as a hand slid down to the knife and toyed with the hilt. A

flicker of fear uncoiled in his chest as John removed the hilt to reveal another razor sharp blade.

Before the boy could react, John shoved him close and impaled him on the double edged knife. "Die with me," he whispered and kissed the boy softly. "Die and be born again."

Betraying his abnormal strength, John embraced the boy and together, they leapt into the river of flames. Frog's screams shattered the silence, echoing through the empty cavern until a subtle change evolved.

Two bodies submerged in the molten lava, yet only one surfaced. Flesh melted, mingled with the flames and then reformed to a different shape.

The man pulled himself from the river and rested upon the bank. A thin coating of ash covered the taut, firm skin. Although the experience was nothing new, he couldn't help but admire the beautiful interplay of muscle and tissue flexing beneath the babyish skin.

How many times had he endured the purging? Ensnared a soul and claimed it as his own before the flames cleansed him?

John lifted his eyes to the river and watched. How long? 150? 200 years since he and his brother had fallen into the earth and discovered the secrets of the river of flames?

The knowledge was a curse. One he abhorred, yet desired above all else. Still, he wondered. Why had he been spared? Why hadn't his brother been the chosen one? He beat his fists against his head, impotent rage clouding his mind. His emotions warred with themselves until John dropped his hands to his lap, drained and weary.

His eyes glittered. Lost, all lost. How many lives had been destroyed in his quest to cheat death? How many innocents had he led to the slaughter?

At his feet, the river flowed onward, bubbles rolling to the surface and leaking the strong sulfur odor. He longed for the courage to step into the river alone, without the required sacrifice. Would an end to his miserable existence be granted? Or would a new torment await him?

Gathering his strength, John stood and stared into the boiling depths. The flames danced higher, taunting him with their power. He leaned forward, his heart in his mouth, muscles tense and ready. His head ached from the fire burning inside.

A tortured cry ripped from his lungs and he sank to his knees. It was no use. He couldn't. The fine particles of ash slowly fell from his body and floated to the ground. To John, it was as if his life faded with them. Loss swept through his soul. Loss and shame. Hot tears spilled down his cheeks as he wept for the boy.

And himself.

\*\*\*\*\*



# A Graveside Chat With Deidra Cox

By William R. Trotter



**DEIDRA COX IS** a name that many readers of small press publications have grown to recognize over the past few years. She has had over 70 stories accepted and/or published, and her tale in this issue, *The Price of the Flames*, is an excellent example of her creative prowess. Here's a look at the person behind so many grim tales of terror.

**WRT:** *Let's start with a little background. How long have you been working in the genre and how did you get interested in it?*

**DC:** This last period of activity has been going on for about 4 years, but I've always wanted to write, even as a child. I got bored with the stories I was reading, so I decided to try writing my own.

**WRT:** *It's amazing how many people say that, or something similar. It must be an almost universal syndrome. Tell me, do you write in other fields, too, or do you find yourself particularly attracted to the horror genre?*

**DC:** Well, I've written a few "mainstream" pieces, but in comparison, they seem a little boring. Working outside the genre doesn't really ring my bell all that much.

**WRT:** *Up to this point in your career, how many publications do you have to your credit?*

**DC:** Seventy-four.

**WRT:** *Most impressive. Any plans to do a novel?*

**DC:** I have one "out there" right now, as a matter of fact. I haven't heard anything about its fate yet, but it's been out there for four months.

**WRT:** *It's a slow business, isn't it? If you're not superstitious about it, and a lot of writers are, could you tell us what it's about?*

**DC:** Well, it's probably the weirdest thing I've ever written. It's not in any one genre; it uses dark fantasy, science-fiction, splatterpunk, and horror, all bubbling in the same stewpot. I was

pleased with the way it came out, once I'd finished it, and Stan Tal's read it, and he says it works. In fact, he's representing it to the Russian market.

**WRT:** *Wouldn't that be bizarre, to have your first novel published in Russian right off the bat?*

**DC:** Actually, that might be the only way I could show it to the folks around here! I'd be tarred and feathered and thrown out of the county if they saw it in English!

**WRT:** *I take it from that remark that Garrett, Kentucky, is not a hotbed of literary sophistication?*

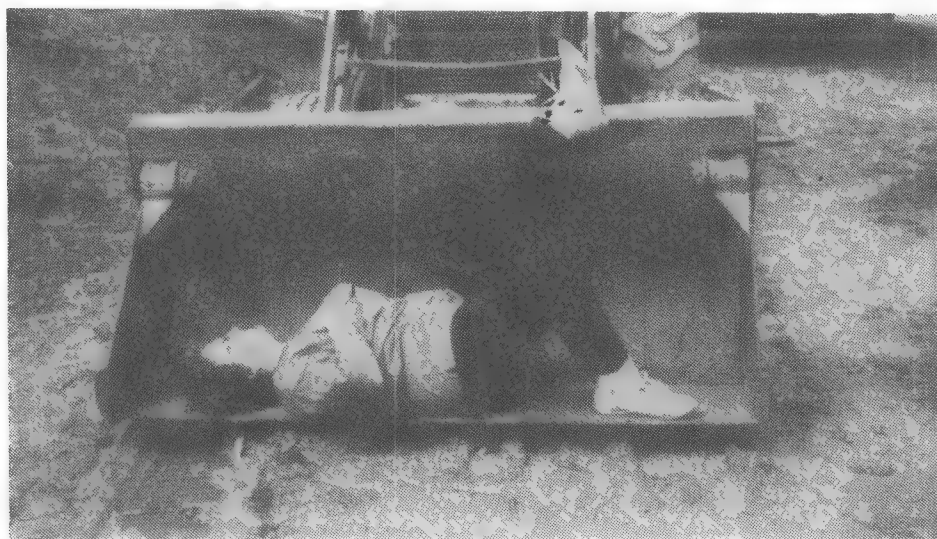
**DC:** It's really kind of strange. Both my husband and I are basically conservative, church-going people, and sometimes I'll be sitting there during a service, thinking: if these people knew what I really wrote, they wouldn't even let me in the door. Someone did once ask me if I was a Satanist, and I thought that was hysterical. I always thought I displayed my faith rather broadly--I mean, my whole family's right there in church every Sunday--so I wanted to crawl under a chair when I got asked that question.

**WRT:** *I guess a lot of people don't understand how writers can live a normal, law-abiding, moral life and still write about the outrageous stuff in their work.*

**DC:** Yes, and it wouldn't have been so bad if the incident hadn't happened in the post office, at the first of the month, with people lined up for their welfare and social security and food stamps and all that. Just a whole multitude of friends and neighbors standing around when this fellow says to me, "You get the weirdest mail! Are you one of them witches or satanists?" Well, all eyes instantly turned in my direction, and I thought, "Oh, God, let me die!" This is a small town, obviously, and I guess I get the most mail of anybody who lives here.

**WRT:** *You surely get the most interesting mail, I'll bet. Turning now from the general to the specific, let me say that my favorite, of the stories of yours I've read, is Vein. I think anybody who has claustrophobia will get a real chill out of that. I've been wondering if it had any personal connections for you.*

## A GRAVESIDE CHAT



**DC:** Yes, that story meant a lot to me, because my husband is a miner--an electrician, actually, who mostly works above ground. My brother in law does work underground, though, as a boss. And my dad and my uncle are both strip-mine inspectors, so I was able to draw on a lot of background for that story.

**WRT:** *Was the story based on any particular incident that they told you about?*

**DC:** Yes it was. My husband was once sent down to fix something that was broken, and he had to crawl for over a mile on his hands and knees, along a dark passage that was too small to turn around in. He told me how terrifying the experience was.

**WRT:** *God, that's a horror story right there... Tell us which writers have had an important influence on you, as your career has developed.*

**DC:** Well, like so many people, I have to credit Stephen King for getting me interested in the genre again. Until I saw the work he was doing, I had the belief that "grown-ups" didn't write about all that silly horror stuff, that once you passed a certain age, you had to put it aside and Get Serious About Life. Once I got started again, I really became grateful to Ronald Kelly, because he showed me that you could have a real "southern" feel to your work, add that regional flavor to it that makes it unique, yet keeps it your own. Then there was Joe Lansdale, just for having that kick-ass attitude, and I guess out of the "small press" people,

S. Darnbrook Colson. He's so committed to his work, he just inspires me.

**WRT:** *Yes, he's a good writer, but I confess that nickname of his gets in the way of my appreciation. I mean, come on, how "bad" can this guy be? There's a lot of competition for that title within the genre.*

**DC:** Yes, I understand, but he's very dedicated and although I've never met him, we've corresponded a lot and whenever I get down in the dumps, he always says something to cheer me up.

**WRT:** *Yeah, we all need somebody like that. Who are your current favorites?*

**DC:** Let's see... Brian Hodge, I love anything he writes. Edward Lee does great work, and Elizabeth Massie. Beyond that, my mind draws a blank.

**WRT:** *Well, that's a list of very good writers. Are there any major themes or obsessions that you see running throughout your work? Themes or ideas that you work, so to speak, as a vein of coal?*

**DC:** I seem to write a lot about dysfunctional families, and also--this may seem a little odd given my strict and religious background--the idea of personal freedom and of tolerance for others. I think I let off a lot of anger at organized religion in my work.

**WRT:** *What are your*

*current goals, your objectives? Where do you want to go from here?*

**DC:** I want my work to mature as I do. I want to make my friends proud of me. My deep, secret, personal ambition is to make so much money that I can hire my husband on a salary...and then fire him!

**WRT:** *You really want us to print that?*

**DC:** Sure; he knows it. I've told him that plenty of times!

**WRT:** *I take it, then, that he's generally supportive of your work?*

**DC:** He really is. Considering that he's a typical southern male, with all the attitude that goes with that role, he's really been great about my work. Of course, he doesn't always want to know what I'm writing about! But whenever I get cranky or moody, he says: "You're not writing, are you? Why don't you go write something?"

**WRT:** *If he has enough sense to recognize those symptoms, you're very fortunate.*

**DC:** And he buys me all the stamps I want! Of course, sometimes it's hard to change gears when I'm working on some gory splatterpunk scene and suddenly one of my kids comes up and tugs on my elbow and says, "Momma, can you get this knot out of my hair?" It's just a basic, daily reality check.

**WRT:** *Well, my reality check is that the bottom of the page is approaching fast. I'd like to thank you for your time, Deidra...it's been a pleasure.*

\*\*\*\*\*



# HOUSE DOGS

By Mark Rich

Give us your wife," the house dog said.  
"Shut up," I said, taking off my hat. I wiped my shoes on the mat outside the front door.

"We've asked you many times."

"A few too many, if you ask me."

The house dog stood on the overhang of the roof, just above the front door. As far as I know, it always waited there. It stared at me as I left the house. It watched as I returned.

"We have asked you," it said.

It looked much as did the other house dogs: pitch black of fur around its entire body, and pitch black of eye, squat of build, with a mouth that opened to reveal the dim red glow of its heated interior. Its eyes were distinguishable only because of that internal heat, which gave the orbs edges of ruddy illumination but showed no detail. Even if its irises were invisible, however, I always knew when they watched me. I could feel it, deeply in my gut. At nearly all times they watched me. Even when I bathed in the morning. I was afraid some day they would follow me to work.

"So," it said. Its teeth were as dark as the rest of it. I had no idea how many there might be in there. Plenty, I was sure. Sometimes a few incisors became visible against the redness in the back of its throat. Thin and sharp, they seemed to lengthen and shorten while the dog spoke to me. "So," it said again, its voice as raspy as a whisper and as razor-thin. "When will you do it?"

"Do what?"

"Give us your wife."

"I have no wife. I've told you that. Over and over again, I've told you that."

"Give us your wife," it said again, undeterred.

I gave up on the monster and unlocked the door, and went inside. I left my shoes on the foyer carpet, hung my coat, and breathed in deeply. The house dog stood to one side of the door leading from foyer to front room. It looked up at me. Some days I thought this dog was bigger than the one on the roof. Today I wasn't sure.

"Give us your wife," it said.

"Shut up." I went past it and picked up the newspaper it had brought in. Then I stopped in surprise. The chair, my favorite, the one in which I read the paper before fixing supper, usually with a cup of tea at my side, was pulled near the fireplace. The book stand had been brought forward beside it, and on a saucer a mug sat with tea steaming within it. This didn't surprise me: the house dogs were always trying to see after my wants. What surprised me was the fire in the fireplace.

"You'll burn this place down!" I said. "That chimney





hasn't been cleaned in years--"

"We cleaned it," the house dog said.

I tsked, pleased despite myself. I regarded the presence of the house dogs as a burden and sometimes even a terror, because of the way they watched me constantly. At least one of the creatures kept its eyes on me, no matter what room I entered, no matter where I went in and around the house. But occasionally something they would do would please me. I felt warm toward them at such times.

"You know," I said, gratefully sitting in the chair and stretching my toes toward the warm hearth, "I was talking to Mrs. Watson at the store today, when she was in the produce department and I was stocking radishes. Well, I finally think to myself, why not just *ask* if she has house dogs, too? I'm curious if anyone else does, you know? So all I do is ask if she has dogs. I don't say what *kind* of dogs. Suddenly she shuts up. She blanches, and doesn't respond, though she keeps shopping. Strange, right? I don't think I drove her away, for god's sake. But still I didn't ask any of the other customers, even the ones I know well."

The house dog sat on the carpet in front of the fire, its body pointed to the hearth but its eyes fixed firmly on me. It said nothing.

"There's something I keep thinking," I said. "It's this. When's the bill going to come for you guys?" I turned immediately in the newspaper to the want ads. People were always advertising guard dogs and watch dogs and varieties of puppies, cheaply or free. They'd done so at one time, at any rate. Ever since I'd started checking regularly, thinking of getting a real dog and bringing it home to see what happened, I'd never seen an ad. Yet I knew people took out such ads all the time. I could just never find them. "Pets" must have not been the category they were slotted under any more. "What I mean," I said, "is that someone sent you to me, right? You're service animals. You do things for me, and then someone comes along and collects a fee. Like the water people, you know? They have a meter they read, and they know how much water you've used. You guys must have a meter, too, somewhere. So when's the bill coming?"

"No bill," the house dog beside the fire said. "Just your wife."

"No wife," I said, sipping the tea. "So I guess you guys are providing free service. What a deal."

"You will give us your wife."

"You're so certain of that, are you?"

"Yes."

The tea was good, at least. I skimmed the news, lingered a while over pictures of television stars, and spent time at the crossword puzzle. Done with that, and the tea, I went into the dining room. They'd made spaghetti with meatballs. Cheese was melting into the sauce. As usual, they'd timed it quite well with the completion of my puzzle. The house dog stood in the center of the table, facing toward my plate.

"Thank you," I said, regarding the meal. I *was* hungry.

"Wish I could repay the kindness."

"You can," it said. "Give us your wife."

"Don't have one, never did. Apparently never will, the way things are going." I smiled at the creature grimly, then sat down to eat. A glass of red wine had been poured. It wasn't the best. I'd have to go buy some more of the other label that I liked better. The way they kept pouring me wine for supper, I was going through the bottles faster than ever. But I didn't mind. I had no wife to spend time with. No social events to attend. Nothing important to do in the evening, aside from reading a few chapters in a book about the Egyptians, or watching some television. The house dogs tended to be quiet when I watched television. If I read, sometimes they interrupted. Maybe I would have to read aloud to them. That might keep them from bothering me with their absurd desire.

Through the kitchen window I could see Birdwell's house, with the dining room light on. He lived by himself, and seemed to be content. Somehow I'd never been able to bring up the subject of house dogs to him, or ask whether he'd noticed them around my house, or if he had some himself. I thought, once, that I might have seen one, in his kitchen. But it might have been a trick of shadows.

Maybe they were all tricks of shadows. This one in front of me, however, was plainly visible under the kitchen light, staring at me as I ate.

"It's very good," I said. It truly was. They could cook as well as I could.

"So give us your wife," it said.

"You can't get that off your mind, can you?"

"It's all we want."

"No kidding."

Afterwards I decided to read, and sat in front of the fire. New wood had been added. A glass of brandy waited where the mug of tea had sat before. I read two chapters, and considered reading a third. It was getting late. The night outside remained black and starless. The street lights were dark again. They never seemed to get fixed. For some reason I thought about the woman at the pet store. She'd been nice, as she had been the other days. "Maybe tomorrow they'll come in," she'd said. "We keep ordering puppies, but you know, all they do is send us more cats. You could take a cat home for now, and then when we get those puppies in, you could bring the cat back and exchange it for a puppy. I'm sure they'll come in soon." I'd looked at the cats. They all had no hair. It was as if all cats in the world had seen something that had scared them so thoroughly their hair fell out. They were wretched, pale things, curled among each other for warmth. I could't imagine really wanting one. Then I'd looked again at the woman, and contemplated her face. Winsome: that was the word for her. I savored the thought of her fawn-colored hair, bright eyes, and easy smile. I'd check again tomorrow.

Thinking of her, a chill ran down my spine. The clock told me it had gotten late enough. I should go to bed.

I washed my face, brushed my teeth, and peed, doing so under the eyes of the house dog that stood on the shelf over the bath tub. In the morning it often got wet, if I had the

shower on high. The water slipped quickly off its sleek coat.

In the bedroom, accompanied by several house dogs, I changed into my pajamas and crawled between the sheets. I turned off the light. I left the radio on to a station playing old hits of a decade or more ago, as something to distract me. I hardly heard it. I stared at the ceiling. I tried to relax, but couldn't. I'd left the shades open, to no avail: no light came in, it being as completely dark outside as inside.

The radio clicked off.

In the silence, the ceiling hummed and grew faintly radiant, as it did each night. Muted light defined it edge to edge, with the exception of an oval opening at the far end, beyond the foot of the bed. Through it a small foot, a leg, then another foot, and then a second leg appeared, followed by hips and waist and full chest and arms and face of the same woman who had visited me the other nights. I'd given her a name but was afraid to pronounce it even in my mind. She was the most desirable woman I had ever seen. Blood roared in my ears. She dropped to the floor, regained her footing, and smiled at me as she walked to the bed. She had dressed herself as before, with scarves and a hat, in a simple dress of some silky, softly draping material, tightened at the waist with a belt. She wore undergarments of some variety that illuminated her form from beneath the dress. I could see her all too well. I couldn't tell the color of the clothes in the dim illumination of the ceiling, even when she stopped near me at the edge of the bed, her thighs almost touching the covers near the place where my one arm rested beneath the blanket, tense and trembling.

"Undress me," she said. She had a voice the softness of velvet being dragged against velvet. It had the clarity of air blowing across snow, pushing only the smallest of ice crystals in its flow. Yet it had the warmth of its origin, beneath her faintly moving diaphragm and chest. I yearned to touch the voice itself, and cradle it within my ears.

She smiled down at me, not at all like the conquerer, but as the conspirator, as lover, as the one to whom I had confided all, even when I had confided nothing. I had given her nothing at all.

I *could* not.

"No," I whispered.

"Undress me completely," she said, her smile undiminished. She had a shape that could not be denied. I could not wipe it from my attention. I could not turn away my eyes. I would have loved to touch the skin of her thighs and sides and back and breasts and neck and face. I would have kissed those lips, and savored the smoothness of those cheeks.

She moved her hand and touched the bed covers with one finger. Her dress rustled and settled itself against her form again.

"Take all my clothes off," she said. Her finger moved slightly upon the blanket.

"Absolutely not," I said, wishing I could inject firmness into my voice. My limbs shook.

"All of them. Take them off," she said. She smiled. She stood there, being who she was. She needed to be no one

else. I heard her breathing. I felt her warmth. Her hand lifted slightly from the blanket, but seemed all the closer to me in its movement, turning a circle in the air as if to cast magic. "Remove them. The clothes. Take them from me. You *must*. My clothes. Take them off."

My heart battered the walls of my veins with a red flood. My hands clutched the front of my pajamas, fighting to keep the fabric around me, struggling to keep my own night clothes from flying apart into the darkness.

"No. I cannot."

My voice had shrunken smaller than ever.

The light from the ceiling dimmed.

"Off," she said, her voice growing smaller with mine.

"Off. Entirely off. They must go. Take them. Take them off."

The ceiling glow dampened yet more.

"Off," she said, so near and so faintly I could not believe I didn't feel her breath upon my ear.

I writhed on damp sheets, sensing her hand hovering near.

Then the light went black, and I felt the eyes of the house dogs upon me.

\*\*\*\*\*

THE FOLLOWING MORNING in the produce section, time dragged intolerably. I took an early lunch and headed for the pet store. The woman there smiled.

"No puppies?" I said.

She looked uncertain, as if the thought of puppies hadn't crossed her mind. Then she shook her head. "No."

"Listen, I know this sounds crazy, but can I tell you something. I'd like to tell you about--"

I found my throat gummed up. I was going to say: *my house dogs*. But I could only close my teeth around an empty sound. My lungs gave out, if I tried to say the words.

"I can't seem to get rid of--"

Again. They eluded my tongue. The words slipped out the side of my mouth, unvoiced.

"In fact I'm entirely fed up with my--"

I gave up.

"--my cousin," I said. Maybe I could fabricate some lie. I wanted an excuse to talk to this woman anyway. Her smile had a bewitching quality. Looking at her I could almost forget--

I could almost forget what I wanted to forget.

"My cousin," I said, taking in a deep breath and feeling confidence seep back into my chest, "has been hanging around, making the most absurd demands on me! He's been a great help in a way, helping around the house. But then he says he wants--well, I won't tell you *what* exactly, but it's something, um, extremely valuable to me--"

The woman turned pale.

Even pale, she looked attractive.

"I've always meant to ask your name," I said abruptly.

"What's your name?"

"Ostra," she said.

"Ostra?"

She still looked pale. I wondered if my made-up story

disturbed her.

"Yes, it's Ostra. Are you sure you wouldn't like a hairless cat? It would keep you company, while you waited for the puppies to come in."

"You know, Ostra, I've been wanting to tell you, ever since I first saw you, how much I've been attracted to--"

"Oh," she said.

A look of sadness crossed her face. She took my cheeks between her hands, then pressed her lips against mine. A cockatiel in its cage whistled. I crushed her against me. Her tongue slipped between my lips--for only a darting instant. A deep-seated yearning for this woman erupted from within me. She fit exactly the mold I'd always pictured in my mind, when I thought about finding a life-mate someday.

She returned my crushing hug, and felt down quickly--with the lightest touch--to my groin, to confirm how thoroughly her body affected mine, in this instantaneous burst of mutual attraction.

She cried out, with the tone of a growing child who has just learned how to recognize a candy she can never eat again: a gasp, and a forced sigh from between clenched teeth. Much as she might crave the sweet, it would trigger a collapse, or a relapse, or something fiercely destructive to her being, her integrity--*something*.

She pushed me away.

"No," she said. "We mustn't. You. Now. Leave. Don't come back. What's your name? How can I reach you?"

Disheartened at being embraced and then rebuffed, but encouraged that she wanted to know how to find me, I said, "Michael. I'm home every evening." I gave her my phone number.

"Michael," she said. "I'll call you."

"Yes."

"If the puppies come in."

"Just call, it doesn't matter what for."

"Leave. Now," she said, a note of desperation entering her voice. "If puppies--"

I nodded. Anything. "If puppies," I said, and fled the shop.

In the afternoon I could have sworn the ceiling over the produce section dropped by several feet. Mrs. Watson shopped in the store, but avoided my eyes. I arranged the cucumbers in neat rows, trimmed the bottoms of the older heads of lettuce, and fought to wipe away the blush that attached to every thought in my mind.

\*\*\*\*\*

EVERY HOUSE ON the block sat darkened. Even the block before, where the convenience store usually brightened one corner, sat lightless. Without street lights operating, and without stars, I could barely see my way. I'd dilly-dallied at the store too long, avoiding going home.

One light shined visibly from ahead, and then another. One was mine. The other, around the corner, shined from Birdwell's house. What if I went to his house?

I couldn't stand the thought. I *knew*, with dread, what I needed to do. I needed to be free of the house dogs. Free.

The only way to be free would be to give them what they wanted.

As I reached my block, the lights at Birdwell's house went out, leaving only the lights at my house to break the darkness. Did that mean Birdwell was lost? Or had he lasted another night? It confused me what it would mean either way. He *must* have house dogs. The conviction filled me.

I hurried my step.

In the darkness, reaching the stoop, I could barely see the house dog facing me from the roof, its eyes and the crack of its mouth dimly glowing. I pushed in the door before it could speak, threw my coat down over the next, waiting inside the foyer, kicked off my overshoes, and stepped into the front room. As on the evening before, my reading chair sat near the fire. A cup of tea waited.

"All right," I said to the house dog near the fire. "I'll give you my wife."

It stood, unreadable, facing me. It said nothing.

I used my toes to ease off my shoes, and walked for the bedroom. The buttons on my shirt resisted my fingers. The zipper on my trousers stuck for a moment. My feet tangled in the material of the legs. I threw off my socks and pulled my undershirt over my head and my underpants down.

I stood naked in front of the house dogs, who had assembled in the room. The fire in the front room died suddenly. The light went out. The porch light outside joined the general darkness of the neighborhood, of the entire city for all I knew.

I felt my way to the bed, and lay atop it.

I waited.

I sensed it then, from the ceiling. It failed to grow radiant. It remained bathed in unseeable blackness. Yet I knew that it opened to allow in the woman who visited each night. Her foot just now would break through the surface, followed by ankle and calf and knee and thigh. The hips and torso, arms, neck and head would follow. She would be gliding to the floor. I heard nothing of her descent, but could be sure of it. My stomach tangled. I wondered if I should have eaten. The smell of cooking filled the house, mixed with the wood smell from the dampened fire. But she moved close to me. I heard nothing still, but knew how near she stood. Tonight nothing blocked her from me: no sheets, no bed clothes, no resistance. I would allow her what she wanted. What the house dogs wanted. If she were the wife, the invisible being of my life whom the house dogs hungered for--or even if she were not, and if she were only the monster set upon me by the black monsters who haunted me every other moment--I intended to surrender. Someone had to surrender. The house dogs would not. This woman, now invisible but standing near me, would not. They would persevere until time stood still. That left me. Things would not change otherwise.

I wanted Ostra. I could think of no other way of obtaining her. If I surrendered to the house dogs, and to my nightly visitor--

The hairs along my body prickled. Air washed over my skin, chilling it before my blood warmed it again. I sensed the



woman, the impossibly desirable woman, beside my bed, coming infinitesimally closer. Desire pumped through me, as I relaxed myself for her. Even in the utter darkness I felt I must be glowing for her, radiating unspent desire. Her clothes rustled as she dropped them away from herself.

She touched me.

I could see nothing still. *Feeling*, however, remained with me complete, unhindered, total: I sensed her hand as it hovered and let down one finger, tracing a pattern on my stomach.

I had no defenses. Her finger touched directly into me, unhindered by the distance between belly flesh and the gallery of feeling in my mind. I melted, raged, burnt, and smoked, and rose as an airy nothingness into her grasp, and sought to become one with her invisibility. She slid upon me. We bent together, becoming a series of interlocking edges and corners, pressed tightly together. Sweat arose on my skin, and dissolved part of my essence so that it would seep upwards into her.

I could hardly imagine what I could be losing, gaining as I was all of her being around me. I gathered her elusive, cloudlike body into my arms. I embraced her hollow breath within my mouth. The thought of her tightened the muscles of my back, as I descended into the spiraling, downward path towards the little death of climax. My mind ached with wonder. I encompassed the darkness of the room, and vied with it for the distinction of being most lightless. I extinguished myself.

I extinguished myself.

For that moment--

I vanished into her. Dead, eaten, dug into the grave of the bed, buried by her hands and her night-blinded eyes and her clutching legs, I vanished into her.

Then she, too, died.

I shoveled my flesh upon her unresponsive corpse.

I named her: *wife*.

\*\*\*\*\*

DIM, DRAGGING, SOOTY shouldered horizon of the city, it upended itself and dragged its blocky silhouette over a bed of coals to give ruby glares of light to its first reflecting windows. I hoped the sun would rise today. It tried, failed, and slipped back beneath the edge of the world.

I walked on in shadow, until a sliver of sun made a second try, washing the darkness into dimness.

I would not bother going to the store today. I would not. Having freed myself, I could see no reason. My skin felt as if it had been flayed away, rubbing raw beneath my clothes. Something deep and aching, as if a row of hind teeth had been yanked from my jaw, weighted my mind.

The house dogs had gone. I woke this morning without their presence.

Beside me in the bed I sensed the hollowed bones of my invisible wife, sacrificed to their persistent desire.

I had freed myself.

I left her remains there. No house dog watched me in

the shower. No one watched me dress. No one had made my breakfast. Making my own proved an onerous task. The hands that had coddled and fed me--how I missed them already!

Now my own hollow bones walked here, through the unshaven stubble of the new day. I felt as if my very marrow had been tugged out of me. My wife's skeleton on the sheets might well be mine, cleansed of life and wrapped in its own permanent stillness.

Turning through the still-dim streets of the downtown, I found my way to the pet store. The woman I loved, Ostra, had yet to arrive. I looked into the dark store.

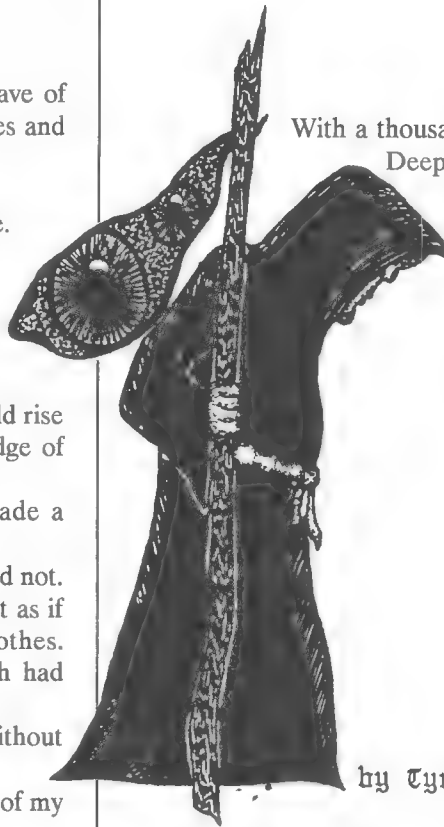
Pressing its face up against the glass of the front window, one of the hairless cats looked up at me and started moving its lips as if speaking. I had no memory of cats having lips.

I could hardly hear what it said, but could read the movements of the soft flesh being touched to the window, as if the animal's breath painted the words there out of the dampness of its lungs: *Your first-born*, it said. *Give us. Your first-born. Us. To us. Give us. Give. We want your first-born. Give it to us.*

I turned away into the street, and headed into the light of the sun, risen almost fully now over the horizon and red as a drop of blood. I would go to the store, where I worked each day.

I would go to the store.

\*\*\*\*\*



In the small hours  
I stare into the darkness  
And it flickers, specked  
With a thousand tiny eyes blinking incessantly.  
Deeper shadows gather at the corners  
And, if I concentrate,  
The darkness begins to form  
Though I always look away  
Before the shapes can solidify.

--Chad Hensley

by Tyra Buhuruz 1993

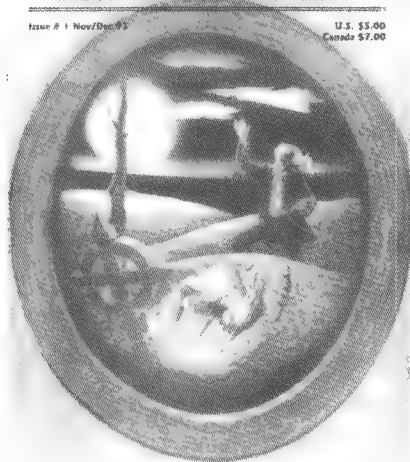
# DEATH'S DOOR

Magazine Reviews by Andrea Locke

## DISCLAIMER:

IN THE PAST, Mark Rainey has generally dissuaded me from reviewing his stories which appear in other magazines. However, it has reached a point of folly for me to ignore his work in this column. First of all, Mark's stories appear all over the damned place, and I feel silly trying to pretend they're not there; secondly, he's darned good and if he won't let me say it here, then I quit. (I'm serious.) Mark is an honorable guy, which is evident in the fact that he never publishes his own stuff in **DEATHREALM** (at least, not for many years now), even though he very well could. And I promise you that if he writes a clunker, y'all will be the first to know.

## TERMINAL FRIGHT



**TERMINAL FRIGHT #1**, PO Box 100, Black River, NY 13512. Editor: Ken Abner. 8.5" x 11". 52 pages. \$5.00

I GET A real kick out of reviewing the small press scene for **DEATHREALM**. In the past, I spent an awful lot of time slogging my way through dreck, searching for, in Karl Edward Wagner's words, "an onyx in a maggot pile." Lately, though, it seems the small press has matured. It isn't a "maggot pile" by any stretch. In fact, the quality of the writing evident in some areas of the small press is getting downright scary.

**TERMINAL FRIGHT #1** is, per-

haps, the greatest debut issue I've seen in the small press. Within the 52 pages are 11 stories. Of these 11, only 2 are what I would consider less than professional, and only because of the high quality of the rest do these seem inferior. I must conclude that editor Ken Abner has a very keen eye for what makes a good story. I urge everyone who reads and enjoys **DEATHREALM** to seek out and buy this publication.

Choosing the best stories out of this magazine is difficult for me. So many of them are so good. However, the best in this most excellent mix has to be *A Little Night Music* by Rick McMahan. Here, the reader is treated to a journalistic detective tale tinged with a definite odor of brimstone. I must have read McMahan before, since his bio states that he was in **YEAR'S BEST**, and I have them all. Mr. McMahan builds logically, adding clue on clue, finishing with a chilling flourish. If you have a taste for rock history and good writing, you'll love this story.

To illustrate the point of my disclaimer, Stephen Mark Rainey presents us with the 6,500 word *Stalker of the Wild Wind*, a story narrated by a German World War I ace. Rainey shows again that he is becoming one of the genre's best practitioners of the traditional horror story. Rainey builds tension and delivers the goods with this one. I could believe this tale was being told by an experienced pilot who flew in the Great War, and the story he tells is exciting and genuine.

A completely new writer to me is Kurt Newton. He offers us *The Jack O' Lantern* that appropriately arrived in time for Halloween. Again, we have a fine, traditional horror tale that delivers a genuine chill. You'll love the way this one ends.

One of the scariest of the lot is by **DEATHREALM** alumnus Scott Thomas. His story, *Catherine's Library*, reminded me of the kind of thing that Ramsey Campbell delivers when he's making all

the right moves. I was impressed with this one, and Mr. Thomas is going to make a name for himself if he keeps this up.

I could go on, raving about the contents of this magazine. Charles Saplak's *Cemetery Seven* is reminiscent of the film *PUMPKINHEAD*, but with a voice and vision all its own. *Memories of Home* is a stylistic nightmare inflicted by the very skilled Lois H. Gresh; it may, in its way, be the most unique story in the collection. And *The Cutout* by Diane Arrelle was brief, but very well-executed and scary.

As I said, I could rave further, but instead I will merely urge the horror community to support this publication. Ken Abner has displayed a singular editorial talent with **TERMINAL FRIGHT**. I am very happy he decided to try his hand at the publishing business.

## Vicious Circle



**VICIOUS CIRCLE #2**, Garlic Press Publications, Rt. 1, Box 8, Roca, NE 68430. Editors: Sean Doolittle & Michael Okerlund. 5.5" x 8.5". 78 pages. \$4.50.

**THIS DIGEST REALLY** delivers. I was pleased with the first issue, and this second is just as good. Doolittle and Okerlund have once more brought us good fiction bound up professionally in a slick format with lots of fine produc-

tion values and nice artwork. I was especially pleased with the artwork--these guys know that good headers and spot illos can add to the impact of a story, if presented right. And they do present the artwork in an effective manner.

The opening story of the issue is a real gem by Wayne Allen Sallee. Wayne's fiction, as most of us have discovered, actually transcends the genre. This one, *Shots Down, Officer Fired* is a truly chilling journey through depression and despair. Wayne's stories are really horror, as if he is answering the question, "Is this all there is?" with "No--it gets worse." I don't know if there is another writer around who can do this kind of story. Sallee is a true innovator with one of the most amazing voices I have ever read. This one makes the purchase of the magazine a bargain. (And the illustration by Harry Fassl is a work of genius).

Someone named Charlee Jacob has gifted us with a story entitled *Vanilla*. This one is a gritty, earthy story: a tale of a torn childhood made even more horrific by a truly twisted intrusion of the supernatural. It's rare that a writer can make me cringe or actually frighten me, but Jacob does it here. This one is intense, and when it seems there can be no more tension wrung out of it, Ms. Jacob kicks us in the ganglia with one of the best endings I've read in years. *Bravo!* Thank you, Charlee Jacob!

D. F. Lewis makes his usual warped and, by now, expected appearance with *Second Best*. Who else, I wonder, could make a trusted nursery rhyme so utterly bizarre?

*The Whittling* was another statement on the horror we commit against children. This offering from Kurt Newton was quite good, even if the theme is becoming shopworn. And I was quite, quite amused by a tidbit called *Glorious Science* by Robert Sutter, III. If this is the stuff that can't make it into the professional publications, then this genre has reached a point of excellence I've never seen in it. I'd hate to be reading for a **YEAR'S BEST** antho for 1993--I'd have to leave too many great stories behind, or make the anthology a million words long.



**THE END #1**, Necropolitan Press, 65 South Street, Westborough, MA 01581. Editor: Jeffrey Thomas. 5.5" x 8.5". 78 pages. \$3.50

MR. THOMAS GIVES us a slick little saddle-stitched affair that looks good enough with lots of fine artwork and basic, workmanlike production values.

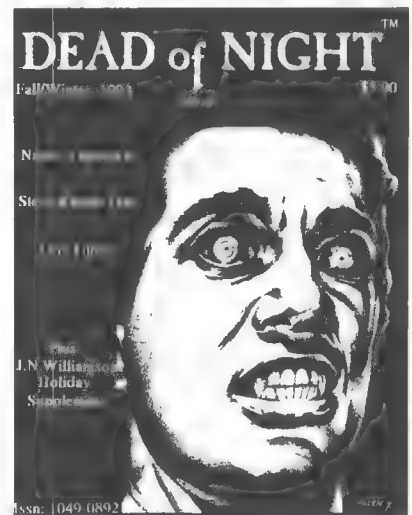
He opens up this first issue with a bright and lucid editorial. I was impressed with his ideas and impressions on the genre. After reading this, I was ready to wade in and see what was what. Unfortunately, I was a bit disappointed.

I think Mr. Thomas was aiming for a magazine to showcase a unique offering of experimental and innovative fiction. But, in aiming for originality, what he ultimately delivered was a bland mix of poorly executed gobbledygook mistaken for "style." The editor presents us with 10 stories, plus a fragment by Wilum Pugmire. I could rail in my traditional manner, I suppose, but will only say that I was sorely disappointed in the editorial effort here, and in the stories. My disappointment in the level of fiction was doubled, since I expected better from a number of writers from whom I have often seen quality work--such as Scott Thomas, Brad Boucher, and Mr. Pugmire.

However, there was one story here that merits praise. Mark Rainey is again represented here, with his story *Visionaire*. This bit of dark, dark fantasy is horrifying in the extreme. It is one of the best parables I've ever read, and is

deserving of a wider audience. I was struck by the unique imagery offered up by Mr. Rainey, and must yet again say that Mark is one of the best writers working the genre. Anyone wishing to read one of Mark's finest stories will have to look here--unless it makes someone's **YEAR'S BEST**, which I wish it would.

I do think this first issue was merely a false step on the part of editor Thomas. He wants, I gather, to offer the genre fan something different, something that will serve as a showcase for another kind of voice. While I was not generally happy with this issue, I will look forward to a second, and will be happy to give it another chance.



**DEAD OF NIGHT #8**, 916 Shaker Road, Suite 228, Longmeadow, MA 01106-2416. Editor: Lin Stein. 8.5" x 11". 64 pages. \$5.00

SELDOM HAVE I been so joyous to reach the end of magazine as I was with **DEAD OF NIGHT**.

I realize and empathize with the difficulties of producing a small press publication, but to come upon such a number of blatantly shallow works, some with the distinct aroma of slush pile droppings, is very depressing.

This issue sort of lurched forward with an excerpt from Lois Tilton's *Darkness on the Ice*. This is a story of a military patrol stationed in Greenland's Arctic Ice Pack. These poor soldiers are being followed by a were-

(Continued on page 62)



# THE Diabolist

By William Bowers

I, Thomas Glanvill, shall bear no responsibility for the times in which I live. In this, the Year of the Lord 1587 A.D., the persecution of heretics and the witchcraft hysteria grow steadily worse. I am prosecutor at England's Chelmsford Assizes.

We try witches here.

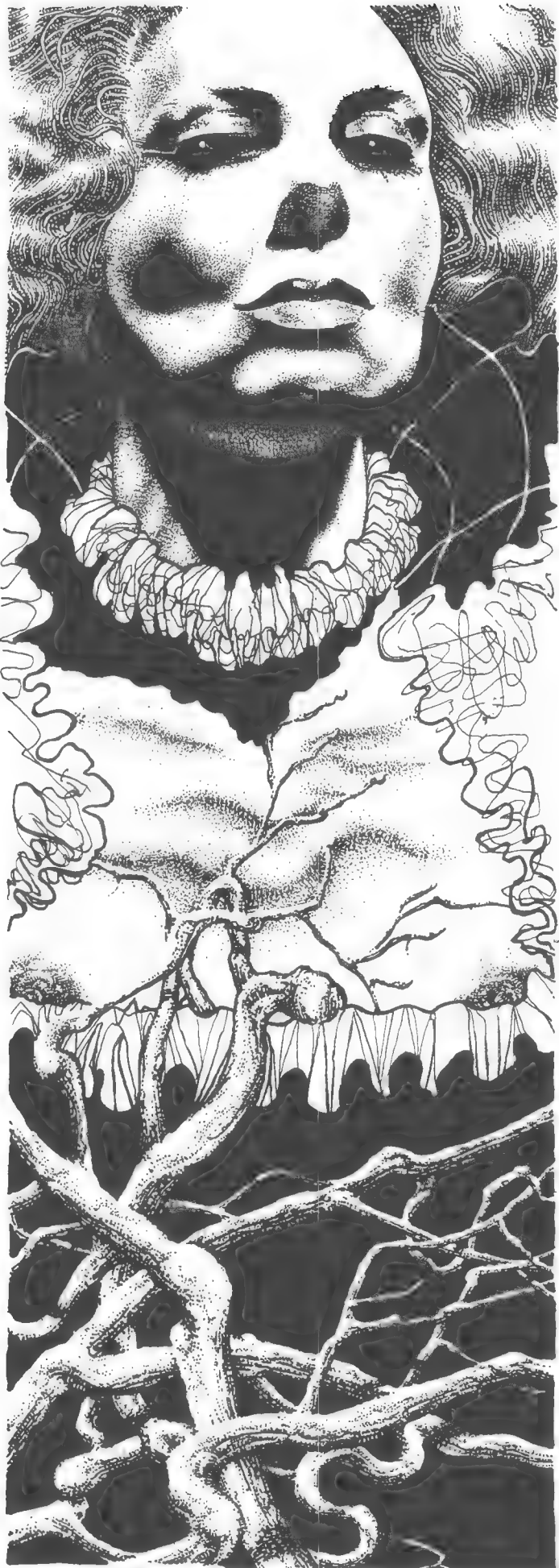
These are terrible rooms, are these. Two small, many-paned windows above the Inquisitors' benches allow a means of light, and as there is little other, the chambers are merely dim. The candles help too, but flicker perpetually, shifting and stirring shadows about the walls, and with the unseen goblins in this room, I am anxious enough.

The court awaits the entry of Sarah Carstairs of Chaucer Road, Peveril, and the townsfolk grow impatient for the trial. They are grey men, these, who huddle in the back benches on such occasions. Nameless, faceless men, restless with dark excitement and perverted expectation, their murmurs and whispers rising in volume as the footmen approach.

I hear the footsteps of the party draw nearer. The spectators chant weird and wild. Such as I am able to explain them in the moments left, the facts are these. Nicholas Corday, prominent pin and needle maker, was murdered the night before last. Corday held a social function that evening at his home. I attended, as did several townsfolk, the guests of honour, Lord and Lady Selby, and Miss Sarah. 'Twere late in the evening, and Lord Selby, Mr. Corday and myself enjoyed conversation and brandy in the drawing room. The other guests had either departed or had broken up into small groups, as did we. For reasons still unknown to me, Mr. Corday did abruptly excuse himself from our company. Lady Selby has sworn that, subsequent to this, she did see him enter his study, and that she and Miss Sarah followed him some moments later, but that the two women parted in what is known as the hall of green candles.

But a few minutes passed when we heard a strange noise, and Lord Selby left my side to see what be. I promptly finished my brandy, and catching up to Lord Selby, found him struggling with the door of the study, which was closed tight. He looked most distressed and said Mr. Corday would not answer. He stepped back and beckoned me to try. The door was locked solid. Bolted on the inside, that I'll swear to.

Lord Selby then told me there was another door round the corner, and that I should try it, and I left the hall of green candles to find an even larger, heavier door. I found it bolted as well. I heaved myself upon it but it was useless. By now we were calling out to Mr. Corday, but he remained silent. I returned to Lord Selby, who was more distraught than ever. Lady Selby had now joined him, and looked most agitated too. And Miss Sarah were there. Remaining guests gathered behind. Lord Selby warned us all to stay back, lest we be hurt, and he did kick the door fiercely, once and then twice. The



door did fling open to find Mr. Corday dead, with much blood on his chest. No one else was in the room. 'Twere a window but it was locked on the inside. Lord Selby ordered us to take the women away, who were screaming.

I exaggerate little and invent nothing. 'Twere unexplainable by earthly means. There was no weapon to be found, so we knew it was murder. Wall by wall, the room was torn apart. There were no moving panels or hidden passages. The room had been sealed. But 'tis only one kind, saith Inquisitor Fisk, who can find locked doors and closed rooms no barrier... these be witches. The terrified townsfolk agreed. Blood was wanted.

But it was not until the daughter of Nicholas Corday, the child Celia, did speak. She saw it. Roused from sleep that night, so she saith, little Celia did open her door and see Miss Sarah alone in the hall of green candles. The child Celia saw her pass through the wall of the study, like it was not there.

So does Sarah Carstairs stand trial for murder and witchery, for there can be no other method to this murder than through alliance with Hell. But I shall not prosecute this case, as I am a witness for the people.

The Inquisitors, Hepburn and Fisk do approach, and take their supreme chairs. Hepburn, Head Inquisitor, heavy-set and soft of face, did bear the scars of the small pox upon him. He spoke in a ghostly wail to the assemblage.

"We need hardly caution visitors and townsfolk against the seductions of the Devil and the dangers of his familiars. Beware also of sceptics. There be peril. The sisterhood of witches has grown numerous among us." He motioned to the footmen. "Bring forth the accused."

Sarah Carstairs now appeared under the low archway, still clouded in shadows. She moved slowly and unsurely forward, the bland metal scrapings of her manacles echoed mildly in the chamber while the curious and the morbid jostled to see her up close.

As she slipped into the misty light, I did see little resemblance to the young girl I met at the house of Corday. Perhaps I never did look upon her closely. Her hair, save for the streaks of grime from her cell, appeared almost a soft orange in the dimness, and her eyes, as I was only to learn inside three paces, were a peculiar shade of pale green.

I know not why the ordeal of this girl caused me to feel differently from the others. Her strangeness threw me off, yet her evident pallor and weakness were expected. The gallery was eerily rapt as she spoke, but my chest was struck hollow to hear her.

"I don't...like...this...room."

Even in terror, she spoke quietly and softly. I was fascinated with her, as were the onlookers who smiled and jeered lasciviously at her, for Sarah were a pretty girl, with qualities that would not weigh in her favour. Wearing still the remnants of her frock from two nights past, ripped and tattered under their tortures, it only just covered her now. Yet it could not subdue the fullness of her, the cloth pulled taught at the hips and at the semi-bared breasts above. And as Inquisitor Fisk were always at pains to preach, it is the sensual

who be the most susceptible to the Devil.

The Inquisitors ignored her while the general clamour did die. Sarah trembled.

"Has she confessed?" asked Fisk to her interrogator.

"No, m' Lord," was the reply.

"She has worn the witches bridle, and has been kept from sleep?"

"Yes, m' Lord. Still no word."

Hepburn's smouldering eyes never left Sarah during Fisk's queries. "You are accused of witchery. How do you plead?"

Sarah looked toward the ceiling. "I...don't like this... room."

"Do not avoid my question, woman!"

She seized a breath, gasping. "Lord, thou knowest I am innocent of this."

"This court," said Hepburn, "will not be tricked. Your sect and its members hold to be true that which a Christian do. But secretly, you do not. We shall not fence with you. Answer me truly. Do you believe in the Father, the Son, and the Holy Ghost?"

Sarah swallowed. "Ought I not to believe this?"

"I ask not whether you ought, but if you do?"

"I will believe what you tell me to believe."

There was silence and Sarah, I think, realized that this would not do. "Please teach me what is good," she added quickly.

"Then you have been led astray!"

"No!" she squealed.

I bit my lip 'til blood did come. Sarah convulsed and sniffed, and shortly tears were about her cheeks. Sarah were shaky now and Fisk studied her with pleasure.

"I don't know what to say. I am a simple and ignorant woman. Please do not catch me in my words."

"If you are simple," replied Fisk, "then answer simply."

"I shall." Her head moved back and forth weakly as Hepburn took over.

"Will you swear, then, that you have never learned anything contrary to the faith we hold true?"

"If I ought to swear, then I shall willingly swear."

"I see. And if I forced you to swear, you may transfer your sin to me? Enough!"

Hepburn paused, then asked judiciously of Fisk, "I take it that your examination has been completed?"

Fisk nodded solemnly.

"What did ye find?"

"One mark," he replied slowly, "dark in colour, quite small, on her lower back."

Clamour rose and fell in the court. Sarah quivered and hugged her body, rubbing herself as though itched. I did sense her terror grow, and prayed she would confess and end it, for I wished her no more pain. I feared under her anxiety, that her mind must surely give way. And now Sarah being more kin than frock, Hepburn was not immune from her effect. He studied her closely.

"How old be you, Sarah Carstairs?"

"I...am...nigh...eighteen years, sire."

Hepburn waited. Then, "How many boys paying court to you?"

I knew the treachery of this question. Good Inquisitor is Hepburn, he would sway the court with her answers. He would leave her suspiciously celibate, or no better than a Bread Street slut.

"I have none."

"All of eighteen years and yet no lovers? 'Tis odd. Perhaps you be satisfied with your demon lovers, woman?"

"No, sire!"

"And ye have no lovers?"

She stared at the floor. "I did not say that, m' Lord."

Did I hear her laugh? What wonder. Who be this young girl, this puzzlement, who moments before her death, did keep her humour and thrust back at her tormentors.

"God will not," she began quietly in that earnest, haunting voice, "condemn a man for taking a little irregular pleasure by the way. Why not a woman?"

I smiled. But Fisk thought that a vulgar statement. "Ye have lovers but no courtiers? Ye are a whore, then!"

"No, sire! I am not!"

The gallery, vicious and cursing, frightened Sarah as never before. The shadows grew thicker and longer about her.

"How did ye pass through the wall at the house of Corday?"

"I am a mortal. I cannot do such things. The child Celia lies."

"Children," said Fisk, "are more susceptible to irrational fear and less sensitive to the pain caused by accusation. Her motives are not in question. I demand again, confess!"

"God help me!" screamed Sarah, "I know not Satan. I am not a witch or the like!"

Hepburn waited for her echo to die and proceeded slowly. "If you wish to avoid the rope, that will not suffice for me, because you would swear under necessity. Moreover, I have adverse witnesses against you, and your oath will not save you from the rope. Heal your conscience and confess the matter."

"I am innocent," she proclaimed.

I could stand no more.

"Take her away," commanded Hepburn. The footmen, restraining their smiles and with eyes alight, grabbed Sarah and awaited further orders. My own mind spun in fear for her.

I stood up. The crowd looked toward me stupidly. Sarah, slower to notice me, turned only after I did cause a muffled disturbance.

"M' Lord," I said, "a child's testimony is good and allowable in matters of witchcraft, as is the complaint of any one man of credit. Either can bring a poor woman to the

racke or the pullie."

"Aye, sir," nodded Hepburn curiously. "But what is it ye say?"

"Am I a man of credit, in the eyes of this court?"

"You are a prosecutor under the Witch Finder General. Of course you are of credit. Do not waste the court's time with nonsense."

"Excellency, I do not doubt the child Celia in what she believes she has seen. But we must mind her tender age and misty eyes. When she did see Miss Sarah, little Celia was not far from sleep, having been awakened suddenly. Could it not be something else she witnessed that night?" I prayed I was not raising Sarah's hopes cruelly. "A child, sire, with blurred eyes from sleep, did look out upon the crossroads of two hallways. I say to this court that the child Celia looked out on an empty hallway, did see Miss Sarah appear with suddenness from the hall of green candles, and then pass by the empty hall. As she did move from sight, she would appear falsely to pass through a wall, especially to a child, when she merely did continue down the hall of candles.

Silence followed, and Sarah did take her gaze from me, her head whipped toward Hepburn, her look expectant.

"Perhaps," Hepburn did concede, "but 'tis no other means to explain the miracle murder. Ye testified yourself, Thomas Glanvill, that the two doors were locked and bolted. I have been far too lenient. Presumptions and conjectures are sufficient proofs against witches. If any come in, or

depart out of a chamber or house, the doors being shut--this is apparent evidence."

"We are not sure she were seen to go in, m' Lord."

Fisk's booming voice cracked down, "Be you Miss Carstairs' adjutant?"

"I am only concerned with justice. I will act in that capacity, however."

"The pure of heart," warned Fisk, "need no defenders." He motioned to the footmen. "Take her away!"

\*\*\*\*\*

FEARFULLY, I SCRAMBLED through the bowels of the earth, these dank and blackish alleys and passages that house the cells of God's unfortunate. As I descended, the sound of dripping water and the smell of old stone filled me, and my feet did slip and twist on the slimy walkways.

The candles are too few here. I did push my face to the bars of each cell. Some prisoners huddled like lumps in dark corners. Others lie dead, for many in the gaol have proved to fly away and others in trying, so broke their own necks against the stone walls.

A cold apprehension gripped my insides, for I then found Sarah. 'Twere her scream. I reversed myself, and did head toward that horrid sound.

**...Bursting through her cell door, I came upon her, and two footmen who stood staring up at her. Sarah had passed out from the pain. Her head had fallen forward, her back bent awfully and her arms, at unspeakable angles, rose up behind her from the rope....**



Bursting through her cell door, I came upon her, and two footmen who stood staring up at her. Sarah had passed out from the pain. Her head had fallen forward, her back bent awfully and her arms, at unspeakable angles, rose up behind her from the rope.

"Lower her," I ordered.

The footmen seemed confused.

"Lower her," I repeated.

"But sire," said one. "She's a witch, and we'll not suffer witches 'ere. 'Tis the order of Inquisitor Fisk. She's not to be lowered."

"I do not care what Fisk says," I lied. "Besides, have Fisk's orders never allowed for the discretions of his senior court officials?"

Our disembodied voices hung in the foul air, and the two footmen bore the dull look of trapped animals. "Well, no, sire. Not as we know of."

"Let her down, then, and leave her to me."

Sarah fell in a heap, and the two footmen scuttled down the black corridor. Sarah and I were left in silence.

I knelt over her, and did untie her bonds. Her skin, to my relief, glowing and golden but for the livid marks of torment, showed no signs of new tortures. I gently placed her arms back to their normal positions, and she awoke from the pain with a cry.

"Shh, Miss Sarah. Be quiet and still."

She looked up meekly and slid her jaw to and fro, trying to utter words. Slowly they came, wet and thin.

"Mr. Glanvill?"

I nodded, and placed my hat under her head.

"Ye tried to help me."

I smiled down at her as though to a sleepy child.

"Why?"

"If you will not confess and plead for mercy, then we must prove you innocent of all charges."

She broke under the strain and her head rolled back to reveal scarlet streaks on her neck, the telltale signs of grimacing in agony. I felt, too, that her eyes had receded and faded.

"What can ye do, sire?" she asked, as though on a death bed, with only the remnants of that enchanting voice. "I know not how Mr. Corday was murdered in that room."

I was not sure, she being so weak, that I would not lose her before I finished my business. She sputtered more words.

"If ye can help me, Mr. Glanvill, I'd be ever so grateful." I did grin inwardly. Normally an undesirable utterance from a cell-filthy wench, yet I could not deny even then her carnal charms and fleshy allure.

"Be warned. I may hold you to that promise."

She smiled faintly.

"I shall strike a bargain with the Devil. My soul for yours?"

"Mr. Glanvill, do not. You must not forsake yourself for me."

"'Tis the only way, my child."

As I did look into her pleading eyes, I knew not how I

kept myself from confessing that I could do nothing of the kind. "The Devil can provide an explanation to satisfy the court. Now sleep, Sarah, for they'll come for you, and I have not much time."

She weakened and fell back.

"I must go now."

With a tug of my heart, I shall remember most of all things, her pitiful attempt to stop me as I rose, and the whispers we shared in that dark chamber.

\*\*\*\*\*

"WHO IS TO be hanged?" I demanded of a man upon my rushed return to the Assizes. I found a man milling about in front among the townsfolk. The intervening hours, I prayed, had passed without heavy cost. I gathered my breath again and pointed to the wooden structure and scraggly rope.

"I say, who is to be hanged?"

The man twisted his face in thought, unaccustomed as he was to the idea that the identity of the condemned were of any importance.

"Yer words fail me. I know only there to be a hangin'. Mr. Hepburn has said it."

I brushed past him toward the gaol.

Again with frustration, the confusing number of meandering corridors and stairwells befuddled me.

The light diminished rapidly as I descended to the dungeons.

I stumbled and became crossed in my thoughts. Where again was Miss Sarah's cell? I took a chance and did go east. Soon I picked up the crawling growl of voices and followed them to Sarah's door. It was guarded by three sentries, who appeared wax-faced and stoic in the greasy shimmer of candle flame. The one in the centre held up a forestalling hand and spoke in a rough voice.

"Who cometh now? This heathen," he nodded back, "be marked for the rope. What's your business?"

"I have evidence to bring to Hepburn."

They laughed and considered this unimportant. They shook their heads. "'Tis done. Be off with you," they scowled, and did prepare to usher me away.

"I have evidence," I shouted, "for the court."

"Who is there?"

'Twere Hepburn's voice.

"Glanvill, sire. I bring light to these mysterious delusions of the power of darkness. Wouldst thou let me come forward?"

Sarah cried out and was silenced roughly.

The latch clanged rakishly and the door fell inward with the sound of scraping wood. The light inside, with Hepburn's candle, was superior but insufficient. The four footmen inside, their faces shining dully like skeletons in the layered light, held fast to Sarah in fevered impatience. I smiled meekly and tearfully to reassure her, but I was not certain she could see me clear, and heavy of heart that my words may not vindicate her. Hepburn himself held an outstretched a paper, requesting for the final time, that Sarah sign the confession. She would not.

"I am at liberty to disregard what you say," he warned. "The court has made its pronouncement."

"M' Lord, I have a piece to say, and having said it, will leave it to your Honour's pious and judicious discretions to take pity on this poor woman, for she is not guilty in the least of the crime of witchcraft, nor any other sin that deserves death from men."

I paused. "Excellency," I begged, now surrounded by his alerted sentries, "I can name the murderer of Nicholas Corday. Will ye not hear?"

"I and I alone decide what evidence this court shall consider and what it shall set aside. Nicholas Corday was murdered in such a fashion..." he said, bewildered and driven, "which proves conclusively that no living soul came near him when he died. No human soul indeed! Miss Carstairs were seen to walk through the wall after him. I am not accustomed to repeating my findings. If you accuse another now, ye bring upon yourself the guilt of innocent blood. Ye have proof?"

"Lord Selby..." I said. "Lord Selby did not attend the trial!"

"What are your words, then?" demanded Hepburn.

"The murder weapon, sire. A strong knife. It did disappear from that room."

"Do we not know this?"

"Lord Selby did away with it."

"How can that be, Glanvill? 'Twere never in his reach. Or do ye profess him a witch too, who can slide his hand through shut doors?"

"If the door were not locked, the deed could be done. I..."

"So?" he challenged in anger. "Ye have already testified, 'ave ye not, that it were truly locked. Are ye mad, man?"

"No, sire."

"Whom do ye accuse, then. Name your murderer."

The sentries again enclosed upon me, their breath loud and hot.

"The murderer is..."

"Yes? Speak, man!"

"'Tis Lady Selby, sire."

Hepburn raised his candle higher.

"D'ye know what ye say, man? If ye be wrong, ye may swing at Tyburn Tree for such a statement."

"Then may I say, m' Lord, that Lady Selby could have killed Mr. Corday as easily as could Miss Sarah that night. I shall not accuse, but I wish to show it possible..."

"Possible, Glanvill? Anything is possible! Your words have not swayed me. Begin the procession!"

Chanting and whooping, the footmen pulled Sarah forward.

"I plead, Mr. Hepburn, wait! Let me show you the miracle! If ye be not convinced, I shall be silent and protest no more."

The men listened as Hepburn held out a straight arm to halt them in their stride.

"Well?" he said. "Explain yourself now. I have been too

patient."

"Sire," I began, shaking, "Lady Selby hath sworn that she did see Mr. Corday enter his study, and that she and Miss Sarah parted company moments later, in the hall of green candles. I suggest to ye now that when Miss Sarah was safe from sight, that Lady Selby did enter that room and murder Mr. Corday."

"Through a locked door?"

"'Twere not locked *then*, sire. The noise that Lord Selby and I did hear was Mr. Corday's death cry."

"We know that Lord Selby was the first upon the scene. When he arrived, he found the door open and did see his lady wife standing over Mr. Corday, the knife in her hands. He did have some moments alone at that doorway before I came upon him, and he did put them to good use. Quick to think, sire, he told his wife to lock both study doors, and he then pulled the door shut from the outside, his wife still on the inside. She dutifully slid closed both bolts. 'Twere why it was truly locked when I did try it, and why we are baffled to this day."

I could see only one of Hepburn's eyes, an interest flickering, but still, he would not face me.

"Lord Selby made certain," I continued in haste, "that I would testify that the room were sealed, and I did. But an escape was needed for his wife, sire. 'Twere why he did instruct me to try my hand at the door around the corner, where I'd be out of sight. As soon as I were gone, Lady Selby did open the door and come out to stand with her husband, as though she had just come upon him. Lord Selby did quickly pull that door shut again, just before the others arrived. When I returned to report my failure, I did see the crowd behind Lord Selby, who did continue his artifices. He did not allow me to try the door again, for he knew it now to be unlocked, but did pretend to struggle still. Before I could help, he kicked the door open. Our eyes went to the body of Corday, and the women screamed."

Hepburn, considering this, sternly stared at the stone wall. "The knife," he said. "What befell it?"

"Recall, sire, Lord Selby did order us away to calm and sooth the women. We did obey, leaving him alone with the body. He found the weapon and hid it from view."

Hepburn shook his head. "No. Ye have missed something. Something of importance."

I began to perspire about the collar. I thought I had explained the miracle away, and was not prepared for more objections.

"To break open an unlocked door," spoke Hepburn gravely, "would not cause the bolt and latches to tear from the wall from force. Yet the wood were ripped and the bolt and latch found some distance from the door, in places where they likely would have flew from violence." He shook his head. "I am not convinced."

Hepburn took a step out the door.

"Sire... one moment please. We know Lord Selby to be ingenious. Is it not possible he did wrench the bolt and latch from the door? He were alone for a time, and opportunity

was there."

"But how?"

"The knife, sire. A strong knife would act as a lever. The blade could slide under the fixtures. 'Twould appear afterward to have come off when he kicked the door."

The footmen exchanged grave looks and dared not speak before learning the effect of these words upon Hepburn.

He lowered his eyes, but still did not move.

" 'Tis unlikely."

I felt a pressure in my chest, so as I could not seem to breathe. But this would make a sound in any event, and I did not want the slightest noise or utterance to distract his thoughts.

Now he looks to Sarah, but is silent still.

I must wait, but cannot.

" 'Tis possible, sire. Is it not?"

"Silence!" he shouted, livid. "I will have silence!"

He turned to me, his eyes afire. "I am sorely tempted to hang the wench to spite your impertinence."

He stared me down, and I averted my gaze. I could do no more.

I waited for the deadweight to lift from me, and for a word of reprieve for Sarah, so that a thousand bats could fly from my being. I looked up at him once more, and he did inhale deeply.

"Tis possible," he said. "Clothe and release her."

\*\*\*\*\*

SARAH AND I did emerge from the gaol to meet with a bright sun. My eyes did not adjust well to the light, but I had no trouble in guiding our horse. Sarah sat aside me in the carriage, her arm in mine, her sparkling hair floating about in the gentle breeze. She squeezed my hand from time to time, and did smile up at me, pretty as new pence, and we talked of our future together.

The countryside was lush, and did sprawl deep and drowsy before us. We rode contentedly for some time, and then Sarah spoke.

"Thomas, thou did not speak to the Devil?"

I laughed. "No, m'love. I told you I would to test your faith, and you did try to stop me, proving you were not in league with him."

She tightened her grip on my arm, and did lean on me, nudging her head to my chin. Amid the clop of hooves, the spring rattle-tap of the harness, and the grind of the wheels, we traveled on some ways, in silence, each of us in the privacy of our own thoughts.

" 'Tis funny, is it not," she thought aloud, her pink face in concentration, "that the Witch Finder General believes he can torture a true witch?"

We rode on, myself wary, ears open intently.

"I mean to say," she continued, head cocked, "if someone be a witch, could she not, with her magic, extricate herself from their instruments and escape from her fetters?"

I did not respond to this statement, finding it an odd thought. It disturbed me greatly. I urged the horse on.

Sarah's mood shifted just as quickly, smiling broadly and

enjoying the countryside once more. I held her close, yet she did not speak further, sensing, I think, that I were deep in deliberations. After several miles passed, I spoke gently.

"Tell me, now that ye are acquitted..."

"And 'twere yer doin'," she beamed, snuggling up to me. "I am ever grateful."

"I know, my sweet. But tell me truly. Did ye ever partake in witchcraft? Weren't thou ever curious?"

She did not answer straight off, and I knew not what to expect, but my query did appear to unsettle her.

"Well," she confessed, her head still on my chest, "when I were but a young lass, I had a friend..." She hesitated, and began again. "We wished to learn about our future husbands, and we did read a book on black magic." She giggled. "We played a game with pointed sticks and toads. It did much startle and affright me. But 'twere a success." She looked at me with wide eyes and a smile. "My husband to be is young and handsome."

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I HANGED HER. There was a large tree in a clearing not far off, which was quite suitable. It took little time. I will always have the knowledge that I did save her soul by eliciting a full confession, something which Hepburn had failed to do. Since she was filled with the craft of Satan, all sorts of legal traps were permissible to achieve this purpose.

How Mr. Corday died that night remains shrouded in mystery, and no one has been able to solve it. The Inquisitors press not Lord Selby on the subject, but that's as may be.

As I say, I am not easy in my mind for my means of earning a living. But I take no responsibility for the times in which I live.

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## **Birthright II**

*By Chad Hensley*

I awoke on the shore of an underground sea.  
Stalactites dripped in the darkness above me.  
I walked upon the desolate beach  
Listening to the rhythmic whisper of an ancient tide.  
Moist, cool sand clung to my skin  
With a familiarity I had thought forgotten.  
Inland, I saw a vast fungal forest.  
Colossal, jagged rocks towered above giant mushrooms.  
Winged, black forms circled the shadow-enshrouded peaks.  
I followed the ocean's edge until  
I came upon a half-buried crumbling edifice.  
Into the cracked, crystalline surface  
A bizarre landscape had been carved--  
There, beneath a many-eyed moon, a two-legged  
Iridescent fish knelt Before a cyclopean octopus statue.  
The hands of the manfish held an offering.  
A thin shrill-fluting arose and my own screams  
Joined the obscene melody as I saw the pale white  
Of human flesh being devoured by unseen jaws,  
Moist, cool sand still clinging to its skin.





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# TRUTH

By Nancy Kilpatrick

**T**HE OLD WOMAN materialized out of the fog. Gaye braked hard. Her forehead slammed the top of the steering wheel. Her neck whiplashed and the back of her head crashed against the headrest. She rubbed her forehead, wishing she'd buckled up. The old woman leaned against the hood, staring through

the windshield. Bright headlights carved up the cadaverous face, casting sinister shadows.

Gaye admitted to herself that she had been upset, was still upset, barely paying more attention now than the instant the Ford had almost crushed the woman. Her emotions were tangled. The divorce papers had arrived this morning and already Bill was busy trying to sell the house out from under her. Only quick thinking slowed the process--a little white lie about losing the deed. Puzio broke his chain yesterday and she'd better think of something to tell her mother. Her mother, who was returning tonight from Cancun and who Gaye was supposed to be picking up at the airport right this minute. Yes, her mother of the chiding voice--preserved and ever present even while on vacation, thanks to answering machine technology. That voice formed an undercurrent of blame that cut down through Gaye's brain and floated about the level of her shoulders.

The old woman moved to the side window. Before Gaye realized just what she was doing, she pressed the button and the glass between them began to disappear. She stopped it halfway.

"I'm sorry. I didn't see you," she blurted, knowing the truth sounded false.

While she babbled further excuses, the crone creature said nothing. The color of her disheveled hair imbedded with muck reminded Gaye of her mother's iron grey. They were the same height, too, the same towering build. Suddenly Gaye realized she was doing all the justifying.

The traffic light changed; a green the color of new mold flickered in the woman's dark eyes and reflected off skin so pale it was almost translucent. Gaye had an urge to raise the window but that would be rude. She'd almost killed her.

The intersection was deserted. Rain had slicked the asphalt in this seedy part of town. Boarded up buildings outnumbered grated storefronts. The air felt dense with ozone and stank of things rotting. Nothing warm-blooded in sight, not even an alley cat. Except for the old woman.

Gaye looked up into the puckered face and saw a familiar expression.

"Liar!" the old lady shrieked.

Gaye ducked automatically, as if the woman might hit her.

The light turned yellow, not sun yellow but the discolor of aging. It reflected in those eyes and down sagging cheeks. In a flash, blood bounced off her, violent crimson rage. The thought came to Gaye, she's a chameleon.

"Look, are you okay?" Gaye asked, nervous, guilt-ridden, feeling pressed for time.

The old woman stared down at her, staring her down. She must have been attractive once, Gaye thought, then felt sick. The threadbare coat matted with dried God-knows-what. A ragged mildewy scarf wrapped haphazardly around the

stringy throat.

The crone had kept her hands in her coat pockets. Until now. One hand began to lift. It glittered scaly and twitched like a fish drowning in air. Gaye blinked hard, wondering if she had a concussion.

The hand moved level with her face. The middle finger separated from the others to point at her. The stained fingernail was at least four inches long, and more crooked than any she had seen on a human being. Her skin crawled. The jagged claw pivoted, as if taking aim at her left eye.

Gaye jabbed the window button. Painfully slowly the glass climbed. Not fast enough. The nail got jammed between the glass and the frame.

Gaye shoved the stick into drive and stomped on the gas. The car screamed into the night.

Heart slamming, she glanced at the window on her left; the woman was not hanging onto the car. She checked the side mirror. The rearview. Not on the street either.

But panic swallowed relief. Gaye skidded a corner. Tires shrieked. The odor of gas clogged her nostrils.

It wasn't until she reached her own street, far across town, that both the car and her pulse slowed. She pulled into her driveway, not quite ready to reach for the control to open

the garage door. Trembling, she flipped down the sun visor. Her face in the mirror resembled a plaster mask of terror. The stress of late was taking its toll. Brown circles engulfed brown eyes. The askew Guatemalan cap had allowed mahogany hairs to escape in all direc-

tions. Fear lines gouged the normally smooth skin of her face, a face that was, more and more, resembling that of her mother's. Her mother! Gaye checked her watch. The plane had landed long ago. Her mother would be on her way home by now.

She raised the garage door and parked. The moment she opened the door to get out, something dropped from her lap and pinged onto the concrete. A clawed fingertip lay like a gnarled opaque insect about to fly up and attack. Under the dim garage bulb the talon sparkled and glowed as if possessed by demonic light. Gaye not only couldn't stop screaming, she didn't want to.

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"YOU'RE LYING!"

Her mother's voice vibrated through the phone at high pitch, as always. Gaye moved the receiver a couple of inches from her ear and pulled a kitchen counter stool close to the wall phone. She was exhausted from the night before. Eyes hardly open, she felt drugged, and wondered why she'd bothered answering. "I'm not lying, Mother, I didn't meet you because I was busy. Something came up."

"What could have come up at midnight that was so important you couldn't pick your mother up from the airport? As you promised, I might add."

"None of your business." Gaye snapped on the coffee-

**Last night she had shared the bedroom with terror. The air stank of blood. Darker than dark corners hid threatening shadows. Why should a new house groan in pain?**

maker.

"Don't you dare talk to me like that."

Gaye sighed.

"I was worried sick. Now that you let a perfectly charming husband walk out on you and you're living alone in that big house, well, you can never tell what horrible things will happen when..."

"I won't be living here much longer."

"You're not letting him sell it? I hope that doesn't mean you're planning on moving back home because...."

"No to both questions, Mother." One lie, one truth.

While her mother rattled on, Gaye shook her head to clear it. She poured a cup of coffee. Once again she'd been caught vulnerable and revealed more than she'd wanted to. But Gaye was not in the mood for a fight.

*Last night had taken it out of her. When she stopped screaming, and she stopped suddenly, as if crashing into a verbal glass wall, she'd used the dustpan and brush to scoop up that hideous thing in the garage. Not only did she toss it in the trash can, but she threw away the pan and brush as well. The whole event felt gauzy, distant. In a state like sleep-walking, she'd wheeled the can to the curb.*

*Gaye only vaguely remembered entering the house, locking the door, scrubbing her hands. She stripped and tossed everything she was wearing into the hamper, showered, and crawled into bed. And lay shaking beneath the covers. She had left the night table lamp on but closed her eyes, thinking it's over. I'm free.*

"Look, Mother, I'm sorry I'm so cranky. I had trouble sleeping."

"You're not taking anything, are you? You know what I mean. And don't lie to me the way you did before."

"For God's sake, if you're referring to marijuana, I haven't smoked grass for ten years, since college, as you know perfectly well."

"If your brother said it, I'd believe him. What, in God's name, were you doing that you couldn't sleep and pick up your mother?"

Gaye sighed again. "Thinking. Just thinking."

*Last night she had shared the bedroom with terror. The air stank of blood. Darker than dark corners hid threatening shadows. Why should a new house groan in pain?*

In the afternoon warmth of the kitchen, she shivered. Fear crawled up the back of her thighs and prompted her to walk to the window and glance out. Rain had washed most of the fog back out to sea. The trash can sat at the curb, as solid as her mother's voice. She sipped the coffee. It was cold.

"I asked you, how's Puzzio?"

"How's Puzzio? He's fine. Of course he's fine."

"Something's happened to him. If you've lost him..."

Coffee slopped over the edge of the cup, soaking the front of her pajamas. "Don't be ridiculous. Look, I have work to do and..."

"Since when do you work on Saturdays, or is this another one of your little fibs? Gaye, if you've hurt my dog, or lost him..."

"He's fine!"

"A mother knows when her child is lying."

"I'm not a child."

"The truth will set you free, you know..."

Poison clawed its way down through Gaye's brain. The left side of her face blazed.

*"You know what I want."*

*Gaye knew. She lied. The kind of fib all children tell. She had used her mother's fingernail polish. Then, somehow, lost the bottle.*

*"The truth will set you free, Gaye."*

*An open palm cracked against her cheek. One blood red fingernail sliced flesh and gouged her eyeball. Shards of color stabbed her brain....*

As her mother rambled on, Gaye thought, I'll never win. Why can't I remember that and stop trying?

She reached to sit her cup on the counter and froze. The fruit bowl. Three Granny Smith apples. Two oranges. Two tangerines. A spotted banana with a rotting clawed finger jutting from a seam. The sharp tip of the grotesque claw pointed at Gaye.

She fell back, knocking over the stool. The cup hit the floor and shattered.

"You were always so dishonest. God knows, I tried to correct..."

"Mom, gotta go."

Gaye slammed the receiver into its cradle.

Late afternoon sunbeams penetrated the glass in the window and stroked the talon. It glittered multi-colored. Mesmerized, Gaye controlled her revulsion and stepped closer. The thing was accusing her!

She balled her trembling fists and massaged her sore eyes. When she reopened her eyes, the clawed fingertip was not in the banana, but the decomposing fruit flesh bore a long gash where it had been.

Gaye looked around, shaking. It was in the house. With her. Waiting to dig into her eye, past the iris and into the pupil and imbed itself smack into her vulnerable brave forever.

Reality narrowed. Terror accentuated hard edges, brightened colors, invested inanimate objects with too much life.

The fruit bowl skidded across the table and the table hopped along the floor. Gaye screamed and grabbed onto the edge of the sink. It rattled angrily beneath her grip, trying to shake her loose. The force of the tremor threw her across the room onto her knees.

The floor under her rumbled. She crawled to the door frame and curled into a fetal position, covering her head with her arms. The room and everything in it pitched. Her body felt small, filled with panic at being shaken by a large and threatening force.

The tremor stopped as suddenly as it had begun. Gaye opened her eyes. The taloned finger lay inches from her left eye. It had sucked in the color of the tiles but mutated the blue to the ghastly color of a corpse.



One thought surfaced: *If I return it, no one will know. I won't be punished.*

She caught the thing with tweezers and wrapped it carefully in a tissue, which she folded and stuffed into a side pocket of her purse.

\*\*\*\*\*

THE SUN FINALLY set and the sky faded. Gaye had been driving for hours near the wharf, searching for the intersection. Searching for the woman. A mental cry that she was acting irrationally reached her as a faint whisper.

By nine she'd found the intersection. Tonight the sidewalks were littered with make-shift housing. Cardboard flattened and propped up, plastic garbage bag tents, plywood structures for the lucky ones.

Gaye climbed out of the car and approached an old man lying half inside a ripped sleeping bag. A rancid smell stopped her cold. "Excuse me."

Rheumy eyes plugged into a nodding skull stared at her. Gaye saw something out of the corner of her eye skitter under his leg. She wanted to run.

"I'm looking for a woman. Old. Big. Grey hair. Dark eyes. Dressed in an overcoat with a scarf. Really long nails. Do you know her?"

The milky irises unfocused. A voice boomed behind Gaye, "Our Lady of Pain. She gone."

Gaye turned. When she'd calmed enough to speak, she said, "Gone? Where?" to the black woman perched on the curb behind her. The woman's skin and clothing were so dark she seemed to have stepped out of the night.

"Inland." She rocked on the curb's edge as she spoke.

"Inland?" Gaye repeated dumbly.

"Last night. Out the middle." She pointed to the intersection. "Hit by Satan's jalopy."

After a moment Gaye said uneasily, "Did the driver of the car take her to the hospital?"

"Nobody see that driver but G.O.D." The woman stepped closer and Gaye stepped back. "Our Lady, she don't need no infirmary inland."

"Where is inland?"

"In land of the dead." She grinned like a corpse returning to life.

Gaye bolted.

\*\*\*\*\*

WHEN GAYE ARRIVED home, the old woman was standing in her kitchen. Under the fluorescent light, her pale skin looked translucent and blue-tinged. Molten eyes. Hard earth expression. A putrefying arm lifted and a raw finger without a nail at the tip pointed accusingly.

Gaye's diaphragm locked. She could not pull in air. Her head emptied and the room spun. All she could think to say was, "How did you get in?"

"Anybody can get in *your* door. You know what I want."

This woman really did resemble her mother. Iron hair. Iron will. A condescending laugh that grated. "The truth will set you free."

*How did you know?* Gaye thought, but said, "I'm sure

you're right." Hands trembling, she searched her bag. Panicked, she dumped its contents onto the table and rummaged. The claw was gone.

Horried, she stared at the wizened creature. There was no way to win. Ever. The grimness of that bitter reality leaked through her brain like battery acid. "The truth hurts. It always hurts me," she cried.

The black fire eyes were unforgiving. There would be a price to pay, and Gaye would pay it. Now. Forever. The weight of an eternity of punishment threatened to snuff her out.

"Free me!" Gaye screamed and extended her hands in supplication. The nail at the ends of her right index finger was luminous, sharp as a talon.

Pain seared her head and color exploded. Brilliant shards pierced everything in the room. Gaye hid her eyes but the spiked prism had already invaded her.

She watched her fingernail plunge deep into the old woman. The rock-hard claw and even the fingertip slid in easily, as if penetrating a boiled-egg. The steely eye cradled it for a moment, then, in a heartbeat, ingested.

The hint of blue drained from the harsh face. The livid mask contorted. Gaye must have touched something soft and vulnerable; a emotion flashed, one Gaye was familiar with--betrayal.

The body convulsed as it fell. The fire in those hellish eyes flickered then died. Gaye saw color fade from everything it had latched onto.

\*\*\*\*\*

WHEN THE COFFEE was warm, Gaye poured herself a cup. She felt calm. Released. Purged.

She pulled a stool to the phone and dialed her mother's number. The phone rang and rang. Eventually the answering machine came on. She left a message. "Mother, you were right all along. Truth does set you free. But first it makes you awfully miserable."

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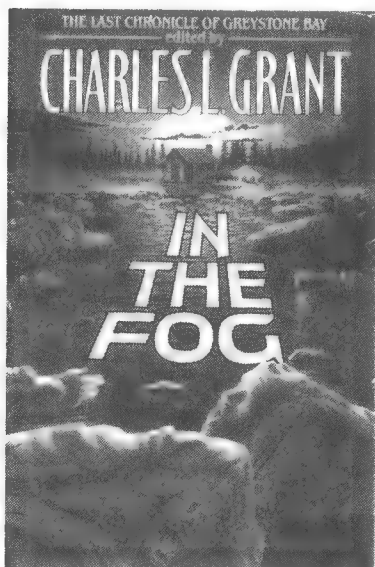
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# FORBIDDEN TEXTS

## BOOK REVIEWS



### IN THE FOG

Edited by Charles L. Grant  
Tor Books, Oct. 1993  
\$20.95,  
300 pp.

*THE LAST CHRONICLE* of Greystone Bay, as this book is fittingly sub-titled, brings the curtain down on a series of short story collections based upon the legendary Massachusetts town of Greystone Bay. Charles L. Grant has assembled a talented group to perform the last rites and deftly guides their words into a masterful structure.

After Grant's brief, two-page introduction, Elizabeth Engstrom opens with *The Fog Knew Her Name*. The tale is one of romance and discovery, hardly what I expected to find in a horror anthology, and Engstrom makes it work. In an almost whimsical manner, she dances across broken peoples' lives, putting two pieces together here, two there. In the course of events, a clue to life in Greystone Bay becomes apparent: if one is a long-time resident of the cursed town, finding love and having it returned to you is the surest means of escaping the town's evil hold.

*Warm* follows next, from Craig Shaw Gardner, and is the weakest tale of the lot. A man's wife goes into a coma because of an auto accident. This rekindles memories of his mother's hidden savage fury, which then possesses his wife's body momentarily. Shortly

thereafter, his wife comes out of her coma, recovers and is allowed to leave. Despite Gardner's efforts at portraying the man as docile and loving, the ending is no real surprise.

Kathryn Ptacek, Grant's talented wife, tells a chilling tale of old age and the hurting forgetfulness of the young. Through the eyes and mind of Head Administrator, Jeannine Walker, the lonely, bitter hell of Harborview, the town's nursing home, is told. And on this day a vicious storm blows in, knocking out the power and phone lines, and laying waste to the bridge--the only connection to the mainland. After a day or so, the trapped people see the lights return to Greystone Bay and their spirits rise. Yet as time passes, they realize the fear of the old--they had been forgotten. Harborview was now a cold, dark mausoleum; a testament to the evil of Greystone Bay.

*Whiteface*, by Chelsea Quinn Yarbro, is a carnival story filled with mafioso talk and made whole by a snow white leopard. The Greystone Bay setting is used to make the story work and advances the body count of the town's legends considerably. Yarbro's story, however, is a forgettable effort. The mix of different elements and characters add up to become an interesting, but unconvincing tale.

*O Love, Thy Kiss*, by Nancy Holder advances even more to the legends of Greystone Bay's early days. In fact, through the flashback of an old diary, the origin of the town is told. And with a flurry of good craftsmanship, Holder flows out of the story into the modern diary of the woman who read the original back in 1938. Good story, too.

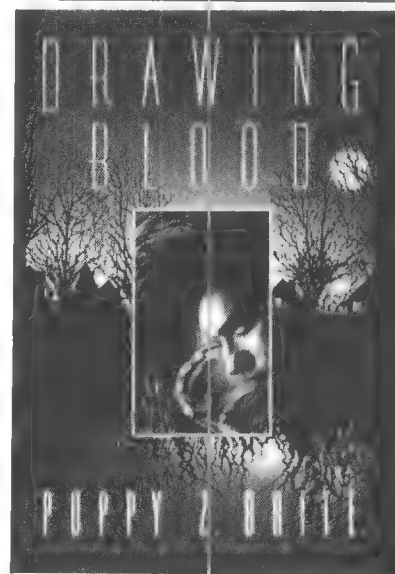
*Ice House Pond*, by Steve Rasnic Tem, is the best of the collection. He tells the tale of a lonely man, pining for his lost wives and child, who moves to a forlorn ice house, desiring little more than to be left alone. The spirits of Greystone Bay--in particular, the ice house pond--soon have his attention. He dives into the local history and recruits some help in restarting the ice house.

The goal is not to sell ice, but to construct an enormous ice castle. The grandiose structure plays host to a fittingly grandiose finale and a surprisingly upbeat end.

Charles L. Grant brings down the final curtain on Greystone Bay with *Josie, In the Fog*. Grant evokes just the right touches as he allows us to witness the end through the eyes of a young man who knowingly puts himself in danger of disappearing with the town. The man's love of a dead girl is the secret and his ability to let go of that love is the key.

It all started in 1985 with *Greystone Bay* and continued with *Doom City* and *Seaharp Hotel*. Now, *In The Fog* leaves us with an entertaining and sometimes brilliant collection of shared-world stories.

—Randy Johnston



### DRAWING BLOOD

By Poppy Z. Brite  
Delacorte Press/Abyss, Nov. 1993  
\$19.95, 373 pp.

During Halloween of 1992, Poppy Z. Brite made her successful debut with the release of *Lost Souls*. Now, exactly a year later, she continues onward into the world homo-erotic horror with *Drawing Blood*. In a triumph of character over plot, Brite gives us a tale of two young men who "find" themselves, and each

## BOOK REVIEWS

other, in a haunted house.

Trevor McGee is the only survivor of the murder/suicide his father commits against his family. After years of enduring boys' homes and aimless drifting, Trevor has decided to return to Missing Mile, North Carolina--to the house where all his horrors began. Trevor has developed into a skilled artist, but lately has been disturbed by nightmares that he can no longer draw. He knows if this became true, he could no longer live. This fear drives him toward the evil house and what he must face to better understand his father's deeds and why he alone was spared.

Zachary Bosch arrives at Missing Mile in a far more circuital manner. He lives in the French Quarter of New Orleans, idly passing time and life away. His talent lay in the art of computer hacking and he has managed to be quite a successful hacker. One night he logs on to a hackers' bulletin board service and finds a personal piece of E-mail warning that the government is on to him. Zach's fear of jail sends him pack-

ing along the gulf coast line towards Florida. Within twenty-four hours, Secret Service men are busting down the door of his former apartment. Zach continues up the east coast, always stopping at interesting sounding locales, with the intention of making it to New York City. One of his stops just happens to be Missing Mile.

By coincidence Zach has stopped here and by fate he is given a care package to take out to some young guy in an abandoned house on Violin Road. Their initial meeting is marred by Trevor's seemingly violent intentions, but Zach is able to talk him back to his senses. And so begins the relationship that both men have been waiting for, whether they knew it or not.

Ultimately, *Drawing Blood* is about love. In this case it is homosexual love, but all the strings are played in way that it could just as easily been fashioned as a heterosexual love story. This is not lesson on homosexual lifestyles nor does Brite get preachy or defensive in posture. The young men truly love each

other in much the same way a man and a woman do.

Horror is use sparingly, but quite forcefully when so. The opening prologue is real-life horror sprung from a bitterness as raw as a whiskey-soaked John Prine song. The first supernatural event of any potency is two hundred pages later. The finale, beginning with a mix of psilocybin mushrooms and sex, is exciting and pulse-throbbing and takes the book right over the top. Throw in those Secret Service guys and you get a double finale.

Poppy Z. Brite delivers the goods when the time comes. It just seems like it took a bit too long to get there. A budding relationship, be it homo or hetero, can become wearisome after awhile. Brite does a good job with her characters, though, and the two hundred page march towards horror is not without its moments. But when she kicks it into gear, hold on to your seat. You just might get swept away.

--Randy Johnston

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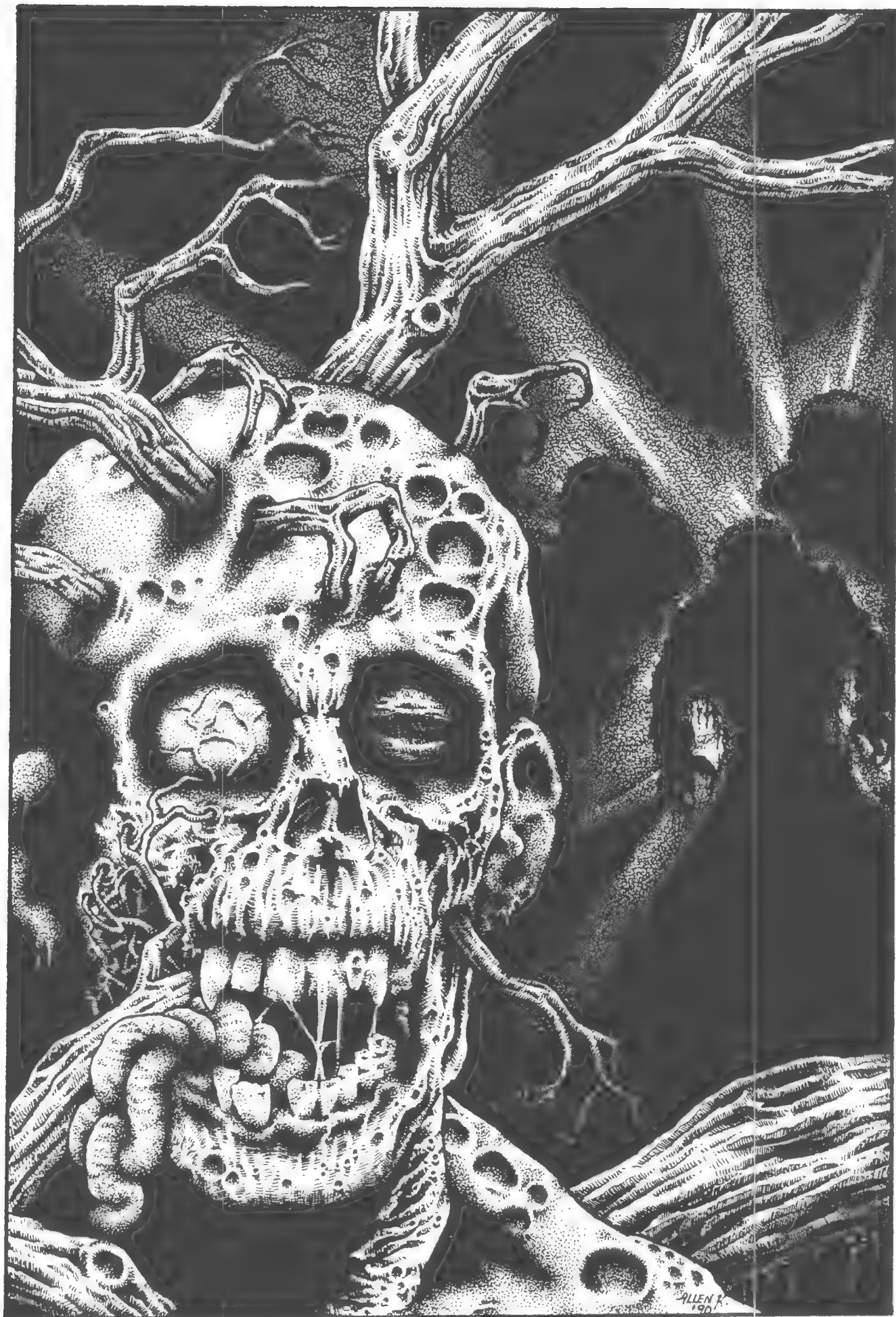
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# Dead Body Run

By J. N. Williamson

IT WASN'T ANYBODY'S fault, but they had to bring in the old Indian in pieces. Doc Arnold, the coroner, started to follow the attendants with the body but had to step back to let a wide-eyed and sweating Tommy run on ahead with the leg.

Tommy put it down at one end of the autopsy table with as much deliberate respect as he could muster, muttering something to me about hoping the lower extremities went at that part of the table.

But the boys lowered the rest of Willard Fox Heart in such a way that his head was next to the purpling leg--the foot still attached--and it looked for a moment as if Tommy was going to lose it. When old Doc tried to place Willard's arm across his chest instead of just letting it dangle, it came slightly loose somewhere and smelly gases rose up from the chest cavity like a little mushroom cloud.

"Thanks for your help," I told Tommy, dismissing him and watching the part-timer bob his head fast and dash for the door.

The only two full-timers the coroner's office could afford to give us didn't even glance toward Doc or me, they just handed him the Disposition of Human Remains form for his initials and left. *Heading for the nearest place to shower*, I thought, not in the least sneering at them or Tommy. I knew what it was like to go on a dead body run in upstate New York during a record-setting heat wave.

What it was like was this way: Hell invading your own body through the olfactory senses, possession by way of one's sense of smell. Particularly if the person who had died lived alone in a place without air conditioning and the reason anybody thought to call the authorities at all was because the stench had reached out and grabbed them, sometimes twenty-five or thirty yards away.

Doc Arnold and I both knew Willard Fox Heart for the good reason that everyone in Van Buren knew the old Iriquois. It wasn't that he was a chief, because he wasn't; rumors had it that he'd been the medicine man for what was left of the tribe in our little eyelet of humanity until the younger Native Americans decided they preferred 20th century medication. Everyone knew Willard because he'd been an old, bent, all-but-motionless morsel of life so long most residents of Van Buren believed he'd been old when we buried our great-grandfathers. I remembered ten or twelve years ago when some jokers at the drug store were making bets about how long Fox Heart could live or if he'd ever die at all. I hadn't wanted any part of that, but I recalled thinking at the time, *Willard may wind up burying us all*.

I looked down at his remains with a sad sort of realization that I would've lost my bet.

And a deeper sadness based on the knowledge that Doc Arnold was going to save anything useful Willard Fox Heart had left before, in all probability, putting him in the part of the cemetery reserved for indigents. If the old Iriquois had had any family, apparently he'd outlived them. Sheriff Collander had already talked with the current leadership of the tribe before ordering the remains sent to us and no one had offered him any more sentiment than a shrug.

"Help me with the head," Doc said quietly, dragging the electroencephalograph over to the table.

I knew what the coroner meant and complied, wiring the dead Indian up like women used to look in old-fashioned beauty parlors. We had to move slowly, cautiously, because Willard was past rigor and a tenderization process was well under way so that slabs of skin were already sloughing off. The bones would sort of *unlink* if a lot of pressure was applied. It was putrefication that broke the tissues down, and neither Doc nor I wanted the spinal column to slide apart and leave us holding the corpse's head. Without the air conditioning and filter system we had even in our little lab, neither Tommy nor our two full-timers could have been paid to do what Doc Arnold and I were going to do.

See, this was not a mere autopsy regardless of what Sheriff Collander or anyone in Van Buren imagined. Only a total paranoid could have believed Fox Heart died from anything more sinister than the most sinister of diseases--getting too damn old to stay alive another day, so there was no point to ruining whatever usefulness Willard had left.

Doc and I--mostly Doc, he just paid me well enough to lend a helping hand and not discuss it with other folks--were running our own little small-town tissue bank. Body parts were one of the booming businesses in America today, no research laboratories anywhere had a decent inventory or complete stock of *everything*, and a reliable medical examiner (and his primary assistant) could supplement their income without harming a single soul.

Because that's how it was with the M.E. and me. Nobody should think for a moment we were nothing more than a couple of ghouls hacking away at their loved ones. There was never a time when we didn't release virtually *all* of every body the families wanted to inter. We also didn't go overboard and kill anyone.

Or so we had believed till Willard Fox Heart's brain was hooked up to Doc's expensive machinery and we got the surprise of our lives. Why Arnold had decided to test the aged dead Iriquois I'll probably never know, since I never saw anybody who looked more totally and irreparably dead. It was only that Doc plugged 'em in every now and then before we started harvesting the body parts. That's a testimony to his integrity, it seems to me. Or maybe it was just that instrumentation developed to search for any sign of life in a human brain cost an arm and a--

Doc was the first of us to see that Willard's brain was, in fact, registering a measure of activity. Feebly, but putting out the vibes. Doc recoiled as if Willard had sat up on the table and asked "How?" But he didn't.

"This is intolerable and ludicrous," the coroner said. "This man's body has advanced deeply into the dying pro-

cess. Wouldn't you estimate that he's been in putrefication in excess of twenty-four hours, mentally unresponsive for more than three days?"

I believe I nodded in the general direction of Doc's bald head, the bushy white eyebrows and thick-bridged nose, the narrow mail-slit of a no-nonsense mouth. He was already absently staring around the lab at our discreetly coded, iced-down storage compartments stocking a decent variety of parts. Tendons, cartilage, both bones and bone marrow. Veins, nerves, a couple of aortic heart valves, even a supply of *dura mater*--that tough covering of the brain. Doc must have known as I did that it was too late already, where Fox Heart was concerned, for certain things. Bone, for example, had to be harvested within twenty-four hours after death.

"Dr. Grigg's study showed brain wave activity continues for approximately thirty-seven hours after death as a rule," I reminded Doc. "In fact, one sample brain test showed it kept pumping 'em out for nearly six days; one-hundred and sixty-eight hours."

Doc slapped the side of his machine and lines on the on-going chart wavered sharply. "This," he said, "is an old man. A very old man." He fixed me with hard, dark eyes before turning away from the table. "By my professional judgment, he's been dead every other way for almost four days."

"His *brain*, though," I said quickly, "isn't dead--unless the machine's on the fritz. And no one is legally dead while there's the slightest brain activity."

Doc Arnold headed back across the lab in the direction of his office. He stopped, stripped off his disposable gloves and dropped them in a container. "I'll give him the full six days, then," he called. "Itinerant Indians close to one-hundred years old don't establish records for emitting signals of brain wave activity."

What he'd meant, though, I realized after Doc had closed the door behind him, was Willard Fox Heart wasn't going to be allowed to live--if that's living, I conceded, glancing down at the disconnected leg beside Willard's once-distinguished head--a seventh day. We were going to harvest anything useful we could find by the morning of number seven, and he would have no afternoon or evening.

\*\*\*\*\*

ALTHOUGH THE VENERABLE Iriquois lying motionless on the table with drains that would soon carry away his blood had been an experienced shaman--till members of his tribe began to desert him for more modern methods--he had never read any of the psychological definitions of the stages of grief. They were the moods through which a human being passed when he had lost a loved one, and people of science attempted to find ways to enable the bereaved to cope with their awful sorrow.

Yet Fox Heart knew what those stages were and had evolved his own methodology for dealing with them. He had learned it all in the same fashion that white psychologists discovered virtually everything: by closely observing the patients who came grieving to him, and evolving ideas intended to help them.

What Willard Fox Heart had possessed that the scientific men lacked was an enormous body of mythology and beliefs shared by shamans like him for many centuries.

For a period of time as long as before the Iriquois, Mohawk, Onondaga, Cayuga, Oneida and Seneca tribes formed an alliance in the part of America known now as upstate New York, the secrets of the medicine man had been passed by the tongues of the Huron, Wyandot and Iriquoian nations from generation to generation to generation. Even the Tuscarora, in 1722, at a time when the great tribes were gathered into longhouses, had been allowed to know some of the stories of faith--and the ways with which believers might regain their health, even at the point of death.

A quarter-moon ago when Willard realized he was dying at last, he'd recalled the three stages of great sorrow and how to bear them--for the good reason that he did not yet want to perish. He understood without question that he'd be griefstricken over the loss of...himself. And a real medicine man could not spend years in service to his people without acquiring insight into that which the whites called "mind control." After soberly thinking through what he might do about the problem of dying, the old Iriquois reached four decisions:

First, a heartsick patient dealt with grief by trying to get over it, the same thing scientists recommended. Fox Heart, though, did not believe that was a question of reconciling oneself to the loss quite as modern men of learning believed.

Second, the grieving person needed to fill the vacuum left by the loss while also keeping alive the memory-connection to the loved one, not attempt to behave as if he or she who'd been cherished was only away on a visit or had never existed. One became actively engaged in *other* thoughts. Fox Heart chose to maintain the connection to his own life by questing for a means to continuing to live.

Third (psychologists termed it the "empty space phenomena") was not, for Willard, what white folks knew as believing for many moons that they *had* adjusted to the loss, then experiencing moments of sudden emptiness, acute loneliness. Willard Fox Heart saw that stage and the need as emptying oneself so completely of all human feeling that the body's pain and agony, even when the skin started to slough off, didn't cause the spirit to depart the body permanently.

It was during this last stage in which Willard's remains had been taken and brought to this white, accursed place where two strange white men put a stranger hat on his head and found he was not yet quite dead.

He had not liked the way they spoke together even though he also did not understand all of what they said. He could no longer open his eyes and probably could only see, now, with his inner or third eye, and he could not discuss it with them or even move; but the older of the two men of science--clearly the chief--respected no one, Willard was certain of it. He was also certain that, within a few risings of the sun and moon, the whites intended to tear him apart. Something in Willard's mind had always warned him of such dire danger.

It was then he remembered the terrifying but utterly free spirit all Iriquois of old had believed in and known would rescue them from their enemies.

And it was also then, when thunder rolled in the summer skies above the building of his captivity as if assuring him that his beliefs would ultimately be rewarded, that Willard Fox Heart decided he would not die at all.

\*\*\*\*\*

I COULDN'T UNDERSTAND why nature had elected to keep the brain of an aged Native American--hell, an old and superstitious Indian whose own people had tried to tell him time was passing him by!--marginally alive, and that made me curious.

I understood perfectly well why Doc wanted me to just go ahead with the autopsy--it wasn't only profits for us, anything useful we could harvest would doubtlessly benefit younger people with a real chance for life--but I didn't like it. That's the truth.

But, since I couldn't do anything about my boss's intentions without causing a lot of grief for myself, I spent my spare time over the next two days trying to get a clue into Fox Heart's stubborn and exceedingly fractional survival.

Most of the lesser animals had just tended to grow larger, while people--or the ancestors of people--were evolving. Common sense said that the brains of *homo sapiens*--us--had to have been growing. According to a Brit at Nuffield Laboratory named Michael Crawford, human evolution "was associated with a universal contraction in the relative size of the brain." That struck me as strange, almost as if it meant *some* intelligent beings had possessed much larger brains than ours--and slowed our brains' growth. As a matter of fact, sperm whales had brains that checked in at around twenty pounds. I couldn't make any of that add up, so--when there were only hours before Doc Arnold would go ahead and carve into Willard--I switched to a handful of books about Indian legend with an emphasis on the Iriquois.

Then the growling in the sky I'd been hearing off and on for a couple of days became a storm for real, and wind I'd hoped would cool off Van Buren got so strong I had to start closing and bolting the lab windows, depending upon the air conditioner alone.

There was one window to go when Doc, drenched with rain and appearing mad at the world, barged through the front door and charged into the lab. "It's time to go to harvest," he said shortly, heading for Fox Heart. He was really annoyed, I knew, because he would have had to slam the front door shut in order to close it, and I hadn't heard it. There was already a breeze stirring things in the lab. "Fools are bound to be driving around in that storm and we'll need the table for them."

I didn't say a thing to him about the fact that he'd just

pulled up in his car. But I did register a couple of mild objections. "Don't you think we should check Willard's brain wave activity?"

Doc laid out his instruments after putting on his lab coat and smoothed the fringes of white hair encircling his bald spot. "Look at him," he snorted with a gesture at Fox Heart's fast deteriorating form. I'd tried to feed him some nutrients intravenously, but the old guy was even more a ghastly mess than he'd been when the attendants brought him in. "Do you honestly propose that a man in that condition possesses anything like *life*, that he'd *want* to go on living with a leg missing and one-third of his skin sliding off his bones whenever you touch him?"

"Probably not," I admitted. Then I looked at Doc across Willard's remains. "Maybe."

"We're doing the poor thing a favor!" Doc declared, fed up with me. "We're showing him mercy!" He hesitated for a second, wind in the little building picking up light objects as if searching for something. Then he locked one of his pudgy hands in Willard Fox Heart's iron-gray hair. "His brain would register pain, if he was still alive," he added.

Then Doc tugged and a handful of hair, plus part of the old Iriquois' scalp, came off in his hand.

There was an awful *howling* sound at that instant--the sound of a creature who was either badly hurt, or furious; outraged. For a second, I imagined the noise came from Willard; then I thought it was merely the wind. But I was

**...there was an awful *howling* sound at that instant--the sound of a creature who was either badly hurt, or furious. For a second, I imagined the noise came from Willard; then I thought it was merely the wind. But I was wrong both times....**

wrong both times.

The creature was the size of a short man and four times the circumference. It looked perfectly round to me, briefly, but it was really an oval shape. It rolled into the laboratory on the sudden acceleration of wind, turning over and over, its matted, long, and shiny hair the color of deep space. The hair tangled with the rest of it--there were not arms, it was almost entirely head--the face completely concealed by the free-flowing hair...and I swear it came at us without ever descending lower than our waists.

I didn't see its small, fine claws growing from the ends of gnarly, bird-like short legs until they were caught in the pale skin of Doc Arnold's pate. Maybe I didn't see them even then, actually, as much as I saw the top of the M. E.'s head torn off with one of the claws even carrying a bit of the *dura mater*. I think his neurological machine would have indicated he was still alive, because it appeared that the brain itself was intact; but Doc had blood running down into his brows and the expression in his eyes showed such pain that I knew shock would finish him if the Bighead didn't.

That was what the creature was, I thought. From boning up about the Iriquois. It came to them sometimes when they summoned it, when their belief was powerful enough, delivered by gusting winds that blew up almost to tornadic force

for little or no reason ever supplied by the weather people.

Revolving itself as it released poor Doc, any face that it had not for people like me to see, the Bighead gusted over to Willard Fox Heart and hung suspended above him while the wind whistled a single unusual note I never had heard before. It hurt my ears and jangled my nerves at the same time that I sort-of yearned for it to go on whistling forever.

Before I passed out about then and Willard's remains were removed for an autopsy by an independent M. E., I'm certain I saw the medicine man in a way nobody else ever saw him, and that what you have is just his dead body--not really Willard. I also know for a fact that I will never be believed because of the way I saw him last and have to describe him, however crazy anyone wants to think I am.

He was clinging with surprising strength to the backside

of the Bighead, his old fingers locked in that flowing hair. He had all his skin where it belonged, regardless of how additionally improbable that sounds--along with his scalp--and I remember he had his tight little smile on his face as the two of them rode the amazing wind out of the open window. And, I believe, out of the deathrealm that was human life, Doc and I.

I dunno. Maybe there are some Iriquois left somewhere who won't think I made up the whole thing. I'd rather like to believe that, I think.

Maybe those Iriquois of the old faith exist, but I can't really believe they do.

When faith and fact finally coincide, I suspect they become the hardest thing on earth to believe.

\*\*\*\*\*

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# THE MIRROR

By Denise Dumars

**C**AN ANY WOMAN ever know a man? Or any man a woman? But let us deal with the first question. It is time for me to talk about this with you, so that you will know your grandfather, now that you are old enough to, well, you are special children. Most would never understand.

I was in the twilight of my beauty: the mid-forties, which, in those days, was just on the edge of no longer being thought old. You grandfather, Jesse, I called him, was the same. For a man, of course, as it always has been, his age made no difference.

He was on one of his frequent flights to Portland--it was a small city in those days, not even a million inhabitants--and I missed him very much. It was winter, and that New Year 's Eve I spent alone, listening to the gunfire that passed for celebration at midnight, saddened me beyond all expressing. I cannot now even remember my sadness. All such things pass with time.

He called--and I could tell in his voice that he was anxious to get home to me. Portland was changing; the drugs and the crime and the boy prostitutes made up more and more of downtown society.

That Saturday I met him at the airport I was as nervous as a young girl meeting a first date. I was so happy to see him--but a different man walked off the plane. Really--I didn't recognize him for a split second; there was something different about the way he walked, the expression on his face, even though nothing, really had changed.

I hugged him but resisted his kiss. His breath--well, I hardly know how to say this. His breath did not seem like his breath! I have no other way to explain it.

I dropped him off at home, and went back to work with the same set of butterflies in my stomach. After a half an hour or so they were gone, and my system had managed to convince me that everything was the same, would be the same, and that when I got off work he would be delighted to see me.

And he was. It was as simple as that. He was quiet, but, well, he was often that way. A typical man--as we would say in my day. Yes, I know how that attitude must horrify you.

There was something different about him. At first, I feared what every woman fears: that another had come between us somehow. Or, perhaps worse, that he had simply lost interest in me. He did not seem to have lost interest in any of his other pursuits, though; he drank his beer as greedily, ate as well, and roared with laughter at his magazine. But he did not touch me the same way as he had before, and that evening, I knew he was lost to me.

He went into the office alone later that evening. Though he had complained of being very tired, he made no move to ready himself for sleep. My jealousy was aroused; but we had

no telephone in the office at that time. He was absolutely silent.

He came out later, preoccupied, reading something. When I went into the office I found something I could not understand: papers strewn everywhere. Your grandfather was a most neat and organized man--too much so, and I used to kid him about it. But the office was a whirlwind, the pages in his crabbed handwriting everywhere--so many pages! All handwritten! The effort this had taken! Surely on his trip, if he had written all this then, there would have been occasions for him to utilize a computer or laptop or even a typewriter. But it had not been the case, and I hypothesized that he must have been writing, by hand, in the office as well, since I had heard neither the typewriter nor the computer while he was in there.

When I looked at the pages, he got the air about him of a man who is guilty of something. Love letters to his sweetheart? I did not imagine that anything so absurd as that would be left in the open, if they even did exist. No, his behavior more and more was making me think it *wasn't* a woman that preoccupied his thoughts but something--less. Something more? Something else.

"Jess--Jesse?" I said, stammering, my voice sounding too apologetic. "Are you through with the office for awhile? I--I'd like to use the computer for a moment."

He looked at me wildly, as though my request was completely out of left field.

And then he said nothing, just waved his arms in the direction of the computer, and made no move to gather the papers he'd left about in any order, but scooped them up in an haphazard mess, just to get them out of my way.

Earlier in the evening he'd told me a few desultory things about the trip--funny things a client had said, a film he'd seen in a reparatory house where he and an old friend has sneaked in a six-pack of beer between them, giggling like schoolboys. But he described each event in a flat, unamused tone, as though--as though he were reading them out of a book, and not having had any first-hand experience with them.

I finished my letter, then went back into the living room. He'd gone to bed, it seemed, after all. Alone, again, I thought. On a Saturday night. I took up a book I had been glancing at--a collection of essays on the writer H. P. Lovecraft. And then it hit me.

"The Outsider!" A tale by H. P. Lovecraft. Something about the mention of the tale in the book struck a nerve. Jesse was acting very much like a man not comfortable with himself--perhaps not even knowing himself. What on earth could have caused such a change? I got a little frisson just thinking about it. If Jesse was a stranger to me, then how much of a stranger had he become to himself? Perhaps this was why his tales of his Portland adventures sounded as though they were related by someone who hadn't experienced them.

All night I dozed, and alternately I dreamed, and woke myself up--afraid, having dreamed bad dreams. In one of the dreams, I didn't know who was beside me in the bed. I woke

up terrified, reached for Jesse--and stopped myself. He was asleep, his breathing ever so normal, his sleep position, totally normal, totally Jesse. I scooted over closer to the edge of the bed. I did not want to touch him. The dream still seemed too real.

Having slept so badly I woke late once morning did come. He was already up, and scarcely looked up from the Sunday paper when I walked into the living room.

"You should have gotten me up sooner," I said.

"You seemed like you wanted to sleep," he said.

"I slept poorly all last night. Did I keep you awake?"

"No," was all he said.

He didn't offer me coffee, so I made my own. "You know, we have to go see about those houses today," I said. Sunday, after all those years, was still the only day we had off together.

He didn't look up from the paper. "Maybe we should wait until Maggie's home," he said.

I sighed. "That's another week we'd have to wait! Any of them could be sold by then. Besides, it's not like we're going to make a decision today."

"Maggie gets home tomorrow," he said flatly.

"Yes, and I've missed her terribly. You know this is the first New Year's since she was born that we were all apart?"

"She's a big girl now," he said, and the coffee in my cup turned bitter.

I finished it in silence. I then puttered in the kitchen, thought about the rest of my day off, and wondered what in the world was happening. This was not a good way to start a new year.

"Do you want to go for a walk today by the beach?"

He looked up, startled as if I'd said something completely off the wall. He made a little sound in his throat, then said in a choking voice, "Why, no."

Women were different then, you see. If I had been a different sort of woman, though, I suppose, I would have said "Jesse, what the hell's the matter with you," but I didn't. All I said instead was, "Jesse, are you all right?"

He whisked the paper away in a huff. "Why shouldn't I be?" he said in a strangely peevish tone, completely unlike him. But I keep saying that, don't I?

"It's just that--" here I was at a loss for words. "It's just that you seem tired--a little distant, since you got home from Oregon," I managed.

"Yes, I am--tired," he said, and pronounced the word oddly, giving it far more inflection and, I presumed, meaning than the word is ordinarily afforded.

And then he went back to his paper and said nothing more.

Once he went back to work after the holiday weekend he seemed more normal. We went out to dinner, to movies; Maggie came home and he seemed as pleased as I was to see her. The one thing he continued to do, however, was avoid looking at houses. This I could not understand, and he would give no reason for his sudden change of heart in the manner. Before the trip, he had been eager to unload the house we

lived in and find a smaller, newer home now that Maggie had decided to go away to college.

Life limped along this way for some time. I grew more and more frustrated with my life; nothing seemed to be right. I hated my job more than ever now, and Maggie's typical teenaged antics--yes, isn't it funny to think of your mother as a teenager--annoyed me much more than they should have. She always was a sensible girl, really, and hardly gave me reason to be short with her.

Then the time came for Maggie to go away to school, and I wished all at once that I had never been short with her for the thousand petty reasons that I had been. By this time your mother was also noticing something strange about Jesse, though she never said anything about it to me. But I knew how she felt.

It was a tearful good-bye on both her part and mine; there she was, a grown woman going away to school, blushing and blinking back the tears she felt embarrassed about all at the same time. Jesse stood nearby, holding her carry-on bag, saying nothing. When he raised his hand in farewell as she walked up the ramp to the plane it seemed an almost alien gesture.

And I was alone with him again.

Now you've told me you want this information for your genealogy files and I can only tell you what I know, nothing more. Your mother has wanted me to tell you this for the longest time, but I told her I had to be ready, *you* had to be ready, and well, I know most of this will not go into any family record but you need to know just the same. So bear with me. I'm almost done.

Being alone with him scared me, but, as before, I got used to it. Somehow, though, I suppose I always knew what I would ultimately do, because when I did it, I found I already had a plan at the back of my mind.

One morning I awoke feeling rather bad, but ignored it, took some aspirin with my coffee and trundled off to work. By noon, however, I felt far worse, and told my staff I was leaving for the day. I expected to arrive home to a quiet house where I could lie down and rest until I felt better.

I was not prepared for what I found.

I didn't see Jesse's car; I assume it was in the garage. It was the last thing I was thinking of as I parked the car in the driveway and put the key in the lock; my throbbing head and murmuring stomach came first.

I probably didn't slam the door behind me; it was a heavy, quiet door that I had painted red in the Chinese manner. I shut it behind me, gave a cursory glance to see that it was locked, and went into the bedroom, shedding purse and coat on the way.

Even once I was in the bedroom, preparing to take off my shoes and the pantyhose that constricted my complaining

stomach, I didn't see him. He was in the bathroom that adjoined the master bedroom, making it a suite. It was only after my cerise pumps were kicked off that I chanced to look into the bathroom.

What I saw made my headache fly suddenly away. My heart pounded; every sense was on alert. I had the feeling I was in an alien landscape when I saw him in there.

He was in there with the light on, crouched in front of the mirror, dressed in his work clothes minus the jacket. His tie hung in the sink but he didn't appear to notice. He was fixated on the mirror. He looked at it as though he didn't know just *what* he was looking at. He brought his face near it (all the time not even acknowledging my presence, if indeed he even knew I was there) and then brought his face away, as if afraid.

But it was the gesture that spooked me the worst. The tentative, gentle reaching out of his fingertips toward the mirror, touching it as though he could touch what lie behind it, or the unknown, unknowable reflection he saw within it.

The moment his fingers touched the glass I knew our life together was over.

...as he touched the mirror gently, not trusting his own eyes, I saw the streaks of grey his touch left then, and the rivulets of indescribable color that ran down the mirror after his touch. I call the color grey simply because I know of no other term for it, know no color in our spectrum that it resembled....

He cocked his head, as if listening, and looked around the side of the mirrored medicine case. Then he cocked his head the other way, turning once again toward the mirror, a look of deep concentration on his face. I cannot explain the depth of the terror I felt at that instant; I backed away from the bathroom, careful not to turn my back on him, and somehow

managed to put my shoes back on without taking my eyes from the scene.

But if he heard or knew in any way that I was there he gave no sign. I bolted from the house, drove to a nearby motel and rented a room. Once in the room my illness came back with a vengeance, and I vomited in the bathroom then dragged myself to the bed where I spent the rest of the day.

In the evening I arose and got myself cleaned up and dressed. Weak and shaken, though no longer as nauseated or headachy, I managed to go down to the coffee shop. I had to decide what to do. I felt certain that Jesse would not miss my presence or wonder why I hadn't come home from work. He was too far gone into whatever he had become for that. I was sure that there still *was* something of Jesse in the man, but that much of him had been supplanted by something *else*.

Of course I had considered the possibility that there might be something wrong with him that had a conventional explanation, such as Alzheimer's disease, or the like. I had watched his behavior closely for a long time, looking for the textbook symptoms. They simply were not there.

But that was not the deciding factor, of course. I'm not a doctor, and if medical attention were needed I would have been quite vociferous about suggesting it to Jesse.

I never saw him again, and he never contested the no-fault divorce I initiated. In fact, after that night I left, he never even inquired about my whereabouts, not even to call my job the next day after I'd gone to work straight from the motel.

He dutifully sent your mother checks while she was in college, but otherwise did not contact her. Her phone calls home were recorded by the answering machine and were not returned. She blamed me for a long time, as if somehow my initiation of divorce proceedings had caused her father to cease to care about her.

But gradually she came to understand the truth, even though, in her true independent spirit, she visited the house to gather her belongings after her graduation even after I had warned her against such an action.

I know she has told you none of this and I know it is a shock, but I also know how fiercely independent and strong you both are, just like your mother. You want to know, and I think you can handle the information. Whether or not you believe me and your mother is, well, up to you, of course.

What convinced me to leave that night and to ultimately never return was what I glimpsed before I fled the house that afternoon I had come home sick from work.

As I said before, your grandfather was staring intently into the mirror on the door of the bathroom medicine cabinet. As I struggled back into my shoes and prepared to run I took one more backward glance. I felt mesmerized as I left the bedroom, unable to take my eyes off the scene.

He was so rapt with his own mysterious reflection that he did not know I was there, or if he did, he no longer cared. And as he touched the mirror gently, not trusting his own eyes, I saw the streaks of grey his touch left then, and the rivulets of indescribable color that ran down the mirror after his touch. I call the color grey simply because I know of no other term for it, know no color in our spectrum that it resembled.

But your mother suffered the worst of it, because she would not listen to me and stay away from him and the house. Instead, after her pleas for his attendance at her college graduation were never answered, she went to the house, concealed her car around a corner, and waited for him to leave. She then entered the house with the key she still had; he had never changed the locks.

She intended merely to leave him a note, and to take what belongings she had left behind and then be done with it. But despite my protests I knew she never quite believed me. She had to see with her own eyes, and she did.

She called me that night, hysterical. She had run from the house, and when she drove away she was so distracted she nearly went head-on into another car. She feared for her sanity at that point, but at long last, she believed me.

Maggie entered the house and almost walked straight into a looped grey rope hanging from the ceiling. As her eyes adjusted to the gloom in the house she saw that there were more of them looped and criss-crossed across the ceiling, the furniture, the walls. At first she thought they *were* ropes. But then she noticed the thin down of hair upon them, and heard

the soft sigh of breath that came from them, and she fled that house without taking another inward step.

"The color! The color!" she kept crying to me on the phone, struggling with all the words she had to describe it, all her attempts doomed to failure.

I drove to meet her and took her home to my apartment. She stayed with me for several weeks and even when she moved to her own apartment, she called me frequently when she awoke from frightful dreams.

That's all I have to tell you about your grandfather. As I said before, I'm glad you decided to work on our family's genealogy. But what he has become is not part of your heritage. You will find out, in your research, that there are some things which simply cannot be known.

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### To My Gypsy Queen

*In Memory of Shawna Graham*

*By Joe Elchehabi*

You were nineteen and so was I:  
Two very different people,  
Yet our threads inexplicably intertwined.  
I called you my Gypsy Queen and you called me silly.

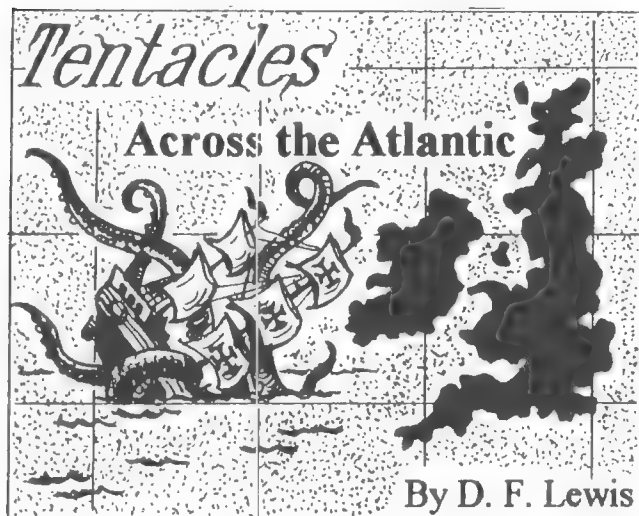
Under the stars and the bone-white hook of the moon,  
We sat in the gazebo and talked of babies, poetry and God.  
I promised you  
I would make a necklace out of the moon for you.  
You touched my cheek and told me to be silent.  
I still smell your perfume.

Once, you asked me if I wanted to eat fresh strawberries.  
Being bashful and shy, I shook my head and said no.  
Now I dream of strawberries.

At the bonfire I roasted marshmallows for you  
On a hickory stick.  
You ate them, smiled, licked the sweet sticky stuff  
From your fingers.  
You told me they were good.

When the fire went out  
And we groped our way back to the house  
In the darkness,  
I told you to hold fast to my shoulders:  
"There's a hole nearby," I laughed,  
"Six feet deep, so don't fall in!"  
You held onto my shoulders,  
Gently massaged them and giggled.  
You knew I was lying.





"And Dream of the Sea came through the arches and sang of an island builded by magic out of pearls, that lay set in a ruby sea."

—Lord Dunsany

THE JOURNEY OF THE KING

AND THE SONG was of Great Britain? Blimey! Surely not.

Seriously, back in the early 70s, I needed enlightenment from the USA in the shape of Lin Carter's Ballantine Fantasy paperback series to become aware of Lord Dunsany's excellent dreams-with-words. Today, hopefully, I can repay the favour to many of you who are stirred by the Horror genre and who may not have dabbled in Dunsany. A British Peer born in 1878, his full name John Edward Moreton Drax Plunkett, he inspired, inter alia, H. P. Lovecraft with the magic of mythos. (Unfortunately, he also prefigured much bad fantasy which, to my mind, is exemplified by the fairydoms of dragon that weigh down the shop bookshelves these days with candy-floss for the mind. But he cannot be blamed for that.)

Horror should be Nightmare disguised as Dream, Blood as Ruby Sea, Hell as Shadow. Not the other ways about. Dunsany is the best such disguise. I hope that tells you more about him than a thousand close textual surveys of his works. Search him out, I say.

I have recently been rereading Walter De La Mare, a British writer who, together with Robert Aickman, represents the best sensitive horror going. Undercurrents of spectres and sensuality. Read these writers if you can. But if you want horror *really* oblique to the point of non-existence (but nonetheless powerful), try Ivy Compton-Burnett's claustrophobic novels of timeless family life written in the 1920s, 30s and 40s. Talking about undercurrents, if your beer is old British pubs, read my favourite novel **HANGOVER SQUARE** by Patrick Hamilton--a shocking novel which, I warn you, will stir any suicidal tendencies you may already have.

All the writers mentioned so far are dead, but all the more living for that. But on to things more modern.

As correctly predicted in the previous *Tentacles*, Kirk S. King's magazine **NIGHT DREAMS** has now appeared from the Sutton Coldfield area of the West Midlands. Garbed in garish purple, it aspires to America's pulp tradition. There's a regular column called *Pub Talk*. That gets my vote!

Which, somehow, brings me to the latest British Fantasy Society get-together in the Falkland Arms, new Oxford Street. A lively affair, where even the pub walls talked back in tongues! So, with due decorum, I shall hasten on to a quieter London Adventure of Three Imposters in the tradition of Machen....

A few weeks ago, Simon Clark, a tall family man from Doncaster, Yorkshire (one of the best contemporary British horror writers who I genuinely believe is soon to be even more well known than he already is) and Mark Samuels (a talented writer and lover of literature with the dual quality of having his head in the clouds and his feet firmly on the ground), together with me, DFL, wandered through the ancient London byways as a sequel to when, last Christmas, we three headed the streets of Stoker and screaming seagull in Whitby on the North Yorkshire coast. Now, in London, we visited the John Soane Museum: a place beguiled with duplicitous perspectives, bulging with bizarre statues and skeletons, topped with a lop-sided roofscape of skylights, sown with darksome knick-knacks, people with peering paintings, &c. &c.--and Simon and Mark felt as if they had walked straight into a DFL story, limned by dream out of hybrid hells. No, not at all. My stories would fail to do justice to it.

We also sat chatting around fountains in peaceful sunlit squares, viewed the dome of St. Paul's Cathedral from new shimmering, non-Euclidean angles, saw the outside of an inscrutable apartment where Arthur Machen honed his masterpieces of myth and monsters...and, oh yes, as Simon wrote in his subsequent letter to me: "the first pub we visited where your's and Mark's conversation was so scintillating I could see it as an episode in a book."

Which, ineluctably, brings me back to Pub Talk!

Before ending, we mustn't forget: even if blood were dream, vampires would sniff at it.

"It was all in London that the thing was done, and they went furtively at dead of night along grey streets and among mean houses...."

—Lord Dunsany

WHERE THE TIDES EBB AND FLOW

# The Night Of The Lovelies

By D.F. Lewis

EVERY MONTH THERE was a day when Bob and I met to talk of life, the universe, everything. My dear old mother would have had kittens had she known the places we ended up. Yet there was one occasion where I had my own doubts. In fact, wild horses could not drag me to the venue Bob had suggested.

"If not wild horses, how about some loose-limbed lovelies, eh?" said Bob, as if he had read my mind.

I looked at him askance, or at least I think I did. As usual, what had started off as a serious dialogue between deep-thinking individuals about the State of the Nation had quickly degenerated into ludicrous pub-talk and tasteless smut. However, I still retained scruples enough to respond: "Bob, I wouldn't be seen dead in such a place, even if one of your so-called loose-limbed lovelies tugged me there by the short and curlies!" I could not believe my own ears. Had I really said that? Or was it purely the shallow imagination of a hard-pressed narrator?

Bob laughed in an uncivilised manner, with spittle-bullets rattling out like a Lewis Gun. During the rump end of our conversation, there had arrived a third party: a wide-skirted female by the look of it. She sat amongst the other shadows at the back of the otherwise deserted coffee bar. I could sense her eyes boring into my neck. I saw Bob once or twice glancing over in her general direction. We gave each other knowing looks, in some pretence of macho coolness, each hinting to the other that the situation, albeit mysterious and pregnant with unpredictable possibilities, was one that we surely could keep within the tolerances of control. He took to whispering, so that the shadow could not hear, whilst the sounds of her fidgeting on her chair indicated to me at least that she believed that even the slightest change in her stance would bring improved acoustics into play, thus enabling her to gain purchase on our words and, by so doing, to affect their meaning by the simple method of misinterpretation. But the Wurlitzer Juke-Box in the corner seemed to have other ideas, taking on a life of its own, since it abruptly rotated through a number of clicks with, finally, the grating noise of the sapphire stylus dropping neatly into the dusty leader-groove of what transpired to be an ancient Buddy Holly disc.

Then, even Bob and I could hardly hear each other speak. And, with the music, the western-style saloon doors of the coffee bar swung wide, to reveal a gaggle of what I could only describe loosely in Bob's terms as--what was it?--lick-limbed lovelies, dressed in an attractive fifties mode, who forthwith commenced dancing a rather suggestive form of Rock and Roll. I glanced at Bob to see if this was what he

had meant. As he stared glassily straight ahead in front of his face, I saw the jitterbuggers reflected in his engorged eyes. I mouthed a remonstrance to indicate that this was not my scene at all. My mother would not only have kittens, but tigers, too. But Bob's mind had decided to go walkies. Nervously, I clutched my coffee cup and hunched my shoulders as a carapace of protection.

One 'lovely' approached our table and, beneath the music, muttered a few words to me, trying at the same time to drape her length over my lap. I was paralysed, but the shadow in the corner bellowed some innard-clogged gutturals which, despite their bestial incomprehensibility, the 'lovely' seemed to understand and she withdrew from my vicinity. I returned my attention to Bob, relieved to see that he was back from his skull-out. He leaned across and tweaked my shoulders, as if he wanted my ear nearer. The Juke-Box stopped suddenly (as they sometimes did if a coin of too low a denomination was used) and his whisper became louder than intended: "I've got a hard-on!"

The dancers freeze-framed. I grimaced, as embarrassment seeped up from the pit of my stomach--bringing with it a prurient froth to the roof of my mouth and rancid bile to my nose and nostrils. "Bob, for God's sake!" He blushed, as I must have done, too, and tried to stand up. However, the 'lovely' lurking at our periphery loomed to the very edge of our table territory. I could hardly bring myself to look up, whilst Bob, now forced back into the bottom of his coffee cup, desperately scried the pattern of its dregs.

The shadow's voice was simply a series of tongue clicks, throat grunts and belly laughs. The lights were doused, as if the meter yearned another shilling. I heard a sound that was too obvious to be implied: a crunching off, like celery, a splitting asunder, a tearing-out of fibrous root from the body-grabbing earth. And the she-shadow was now touchable terror: harnessed to such a root, as she jiggled and jived, in the flickering of her own luminescence--like a jester on heat. The dream-eyed 'lovelies' gave grudging welcome to the jump-lead she now wielded, as they were in turn short-circuited to the very bottom bone and hell of the shadow's searing soul.

The lights flashed once and then came on permanently. The Juke-Box completed the Buddy Holly disc--but it now seemed to be a different song altogether, reminding us that love is getting closer, going faster than a rollercoaster....

Bob was slumped across the table, his head lolling, thick coffee drooling from his lips upon the formica. And there was a slurping noise upon the floor from somewhere below the table, a spilling that became a splattering. I shrugged. I could've wept blood. I'd taken Bob out on the wrong day of the month--yet again.

There was no sign of the 'lovelies' anywhere. Loose bits, all of them! I cursed my mother, for not warning me about life and its pitfalls. All she ever did was irritatingly twiddle her whiskers as she nagged me to keep clean by licking my underparts and always to help the earth to gobble up my doings.

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D.F. LEWIS:

# THE WIZARD OF ODD



*"Wait! He's not ready. He'll be changing...he always springs back out as something different."*

"I HAVE A PARANOID SENSATION THAT I'M ALWAYS BEING FOLLOWED BY D. F. LEWIS... It's like he's always there to torment me. No matter how hard I try, I can never understand his stories. Furthermore, I can't get away from him even if I switch genres, because the man is so blasted versatile! Is he for real, or did somebody invent him purely to annoy me?--Persecuted, Bognor Regis."

THEY ALWAYS WANT to know: what's he *really* like? It's a difficult question to answer, a spinosity, if you like. As I've only spent a bit of time with him, I can tell you this: I don't know. Well, I do, sort of. But it feels presumptuous in the extreme to attempt any kind of description of D. F. Lewis.

Tall? Maybe. Warm? Definitely. One of the last true gentlemen left on the face of this cranky old planet. Articulate. Owlsh glasses and a beard that hides a smile of such sweetness as to belie that mad love of dangerous words. We did an interview last year, a marathon affair involving 9 writers and editors, macaroni-with-cheese, several empty beer cans and one mineral water bottle. Des had the place of honor in a hideously upholstered armchair-cum-throne. With an M. R. Jamesian suspicion of things mechanical, at first he was hesitant in the face of the hand-held recorder. It did not take him long to warm to the discussion and soon Des was brandishing the recorder, and his own opinions, with the boldness of a samurai warrior hands-onto his favorite sword.

# Profile

By  
Marni Scofidio

The man is committed to his family, to writing, to discovery, self- and otherwise. You feel that instead of any one of these taking precedent over the other, they all encompass and support one another. His prolific output--500 stories published in the UK and the USA--at first glance might appear daunting. But there are factors to be considered, such as the length of a Lewis tale, and the actual time his accomplishments have taken.

I mention having read somewhere that in 1967 August Derleth of Arkham House rejected one of his stories, and after that Des stopped writing for a couple of years.

"A couple of years? No, it was more like 20... I had gotten a lot of my interest in horror through reading (Derleth's anthologies: **WHEN EVIL WAKES, THE NIGHT SIDE, WHO KNOCKS?, DARK MIND, DARK HEART**), which were excellent, and had come out in the 60s and early 70s. I sent him a couple stories and I think he wrote back saying 'Pretty much pure grue.' I didn't have much confidence in my writing then as I've not got much confidence in my writing now, so I just figured, we-e-ell, I'm not going to be a famous writer, only 'special' people are famous writers. So I dabbled at writing now and again during that 20 years whilst bringing up a family. Who've now grown up."

And the other 500 "children" have come into being (is publication about the closest a man can come to giving birth?) only since 1987.

On this Tuesday in March, in Hampstead--a rarified suburb of London--Des seems calm and composed, smartly dressed in white mock turtleneck and dark sports jacket reminiscent of Roger Moore's "Saint." He claims a bit of nervousness. I am nervous too. Biographical articles are worse to sketch than portraits; there's more of a chance of getting it wrong.

He's easy to talk to and forthcoming of information. He also admits to a happy life that, like the smile, seems contradictory to the darkness he writes about: "Well. Well. Generally speaking, one has an urge to write, and one doesn't know where it comes from. Perhaps I'm a reincarnation of Charles Dickens. I might be a genius. I might be completely mad. But I know which of those 3 things is most likely.

"Basically, I love words, and the sound of words, and the structure of words. It's verbal icons on the page, the form rather than the content. And in recent years I've been trying to put more content into the words. I used to write poems which were ~~all~~ form, and the start, the phonetics, the syntax were all form, rather than action: there wasn't any, just gobbledegook. In the last 5 or 6 years when I have been writing what I can only describe as horror prose pieces, I've been trying to instill more content into that form, because it's

basically the form I'm in love with, not content."

Often when an editor receives a Lewis ms., or requests a bio, he also receives an info sheet that is actually an entertainment in its own write. As well as his impressive credits, including **BEST NEW HORROR, BIZARRE BAZAAR '92 & '93, THE ULTIMATE ZOMBIE**--several gigs in **YEAR'S BEST HORROR**--this sheet contains a catalog of mostly critical comments on Des' work, toads-turned-pearls by that elusive enchantress, Success: not only the success of publication, but the success of masters in the field--Ramsey Campbell, Karl Edward Wagner, Thomas Ligotti (one of Des' favorite authors)--acknowledging a rare talent. His submissions do not tax Jessica Amanda Salmonson's thin editorial patience. He was recently delighted by the acclaimed **GOTHIC LIGHT**'s proclamation that he is one of their 4 chosen authors, in the company of Ellison, Bradbury, and Lewis Carroll.

"But why are your stories so short?"

(**HOW DOES HE DO IT?** The story *Dreamaholic* manages both characterization and finger-in-your-eye poppin' gut reactions in the framework of 300 words, by Christ!)

"They seem to fit themselves into that space, really."

Des writes on the train, in the pub, if he gets stuck waiting somewhere. He is probably writing as I type this, "working on my usual sort of prose pieces, some longer than others, some shorter than others, ranging from 2 sentences to 3 or 4 thousand words. 3 or 4 thousand words is, for me, a novella."

*Am I really writing this? I don't believe in tarradiddles about things that can never happen. I want to write a masterpiece, a biography or history or a tract on some philosophical matter, or even scientific. That man, if man it really is, has made me write...a story of the worst kind. Ghost stories are one more ratchet along the spectrum of deceit than even those of spies and intrigues and wars and love affairs. In my heyday, sex and violence were not given the time of day.*

CAN WORDS REALLY hurt anybody? After all, we live in a world where Charles Manson was inspired by the Beatles....

"I don't believe in that theory, that you can cause someone to do something he wouldn't otherwise do. Hopefully you can give an added dimension to someone's imagination, which is being a bit pretentious, because we're supposing we writers have got that added dimension already. I've been most surprised at the effect of my stories because basically I wouldn't have thought anyone would be interested in them. But they have struck a chord with certain people and the accident of fate--when I actually submitted a story in 1986 and it was later accepted, to my absolute shock--a *pleasant* shock!--that's 20 years after the first submission to August Dérleth. I didn't submit anything in the period in between."

Des once mentioned writing at a very young age, tales that would shock the teacher; though the teacher who has been the mainstay of his life for over 23 years seems well nigh unshockable. Killy Lewis "does not read my stuff (I don't

blame her!). She knows my style, which is not really her thing--and though she humors me and is rather bemused that some other people want to read what I write, Killy encourages me. She knows I'd probably be very miserable without writing."

I used to think of Des, who for 22 years was Customer Service Manager in an insurance office, as the Wallace Stevens of horror. He was laid off his job last year. As well as being able to write full time, the family's burgeoning housework problem has been solved: "We all had pretty busy schedules and were wondering how to manage the vacuuming. I'm it." The mental picture is mind-boggling: the King of the Dark Vignette calling his muse over a tub of Fairy washing liquid and dinner dishes. In the world of D. F. Lewis, anything is possible.

While housework might never come under the pleasure category, it doesn't take much arm-twisting to discover Des' true loves. Music's easy to guess. How many writers lose themselves in music as they work? This article was composed under the ferocious influence of The Pogues' shriekback on my turntable. Des likes all sorts of stuff, particularly minimalists Philip Glass and Steve Reich; he's even got a CD of Napalm Death hiding in his collection. "However, my greatest loves are Schubert, Brahms, Mahler, Beethoven. Avant-garde classical music; my 'Road to Damascus' in my creative life was Stravinsky." Blinded by the Rite of Spring. Set on a path of destruction: any chance of a style that can be pigeon-holed thrown into flames. He used to compose music, too, dabbling, jamming on electric organ, flute, piccolo and clarinet with his kids in the utility room.

Astrology is another Lewis passion: Des charts horoscopes.

"That was another thing that led me thinking along various lines. By doing astrology, you actually look at people more closely, to try and understand them, to see if they fit the horoscope you've cast for them. Because I got interested in people that way, more content came into my form because I was actually thinking about people, and their emotions, and their fears, and their pleasures."

And to the obvious follow-up question: "If I were to cast my horoscope, I would say it fits what I think of myself. My wife's a Scorpio. I'm a Capricorn with Leo rising, moon in Aries.

"Now, my moon in Aries is very heavily aspected with other planets--I don't know if you understand this--there are significant angles between the planets as well as their position in the Zodiac. I think what really does do it for me is my Pluto. Pluto is a very slow-moving planet and has only recently been discovered. Pluto is exactly conjunct with my ascendant, the time I was born, 13 degrees Leo. It's also very close to Saturn, a dark sign. I think the Pluto conjunct has sparked my interest in horror and the dark side."

As our conversation continues we bounce back and forth between subjects, not his doing; there is so much I want to ask him and Des is so very easy to talk to. At the February Shakespeare pub writers' meet my companion is struck by



## PROFILE OF D. F. LEWIS

Des' conversational facility and quick wit. He talks D. F. Lewis all the bus ride home. Then I am asked for a copy of one of his stories. I oblige with *Squabble* and my companion throws the magazine it appears in onto the bed: "He's sick! Sick!" I ask Des about that, how he deals with that sort of response to his work. He reminds me of Jonathan Swift and an essay Swift wrote in reaction to the famine in 18th century Ireland. *A Modest Proposal* merely suggested that babies be boiled for consumption in the absence of potatoes; and not everyone can take a joke. The resultant furor over Swift's high satire may be comparable to the modern reader's misunderstanding of a Lewis parable, also blood-rich in irony.

Or, "perhaps people dislike my work (when) they don't recognize the elements in it which they are used to." The explicit gore or sex that categorize stories as "horror" today--the delineation of comic book monsters; but Des is far, far more subtle than that. His writing has been called "Lovecraftian," but the only similarity I can see to HPL is the absolute *originality* of Des' work.

*But sometimes, I have a nightmare that someone has unstitched my head, exchanged me for someone else inside it, and stitched it up again.*

READING D. F. Lewis' *Look Don't Touch* I feel my eyes seared by the sudden shock of the story's secret life, unfolding. I have been reading horror and supernatural fiction for 25 years. What leaves me wide-eyed is the actual ability of this writer to still surprise, even chill, a heart grown used to the second guess. Lewis captures the secret language of commonplace thoughts, transforms the mundane into the arcane. He is a verbal swordsman. And he knows just how, and where, to strike.

\*\*\*\*\*

D. F. LEWIS: born 18 January 1948 in Walton-on-the-Naze (Essex--England's very own answer to California's San Fernando Valley); one grandfather a Llanelli mineworker, the other an East End dockworker. His children are Ivan and the Poe-named Berenice; his wife the lovely and patient Killy.

I'm dying to ask

(MR. LEWIS, WHERE DO YOU GET YOUR IDEAS?)

but would never risk such a cliché. According to a UK magazine called *INVASION OF THE SAD MAN-EATING MUSHROOMS*, Des is *not* on magic mushrooms, only 2 pints every other Friday down at his local pub. But 2 pints of what?

His influences are mostly mainstream authors you couldn't put in the junk-pop category: Dickens, John Barth, Lawrence Durrell, Anita Brookner. Because of Des I've discovered the authentic, sad, chilling work of Patrick Hamilton; the last few sentences of *Hangover Square* brought tears,

laughter, and goosebumps, all at the same time. It's important to mention that one of Des' great and cosseted *bete noirs* is the takeover of bookstore horror shelves by lots of "commercial crap," while some of the treasures of the genre, such as Robert Aickman and Thomas Ligotti, are practically unavailable.

It's getting late; soon we will both have trains to catch. I quickly ask Des if he's had any luck in finding publishers for several projects he's got going, among them: 1) a 60,000 word novel-format collection, *SLIGHT GHOST IN THE NIGHT HUTCH*; 2) an alternate world novella, *Agra Aska*; 3) a short novella about a private dick called Dogmucker Lean; 4) a short novella about a ladies' social group; 5) *The Egnisomicon*, co-written with P. F. Jeffrey; and--

The one that fascinates me is listed as "THE 1973 NOVEL BY DFL WHICH EVEN DFL NOW FAILS TO UNDERSTAND!"

"It's called *THE VISITOR*, and I *think* it's about these



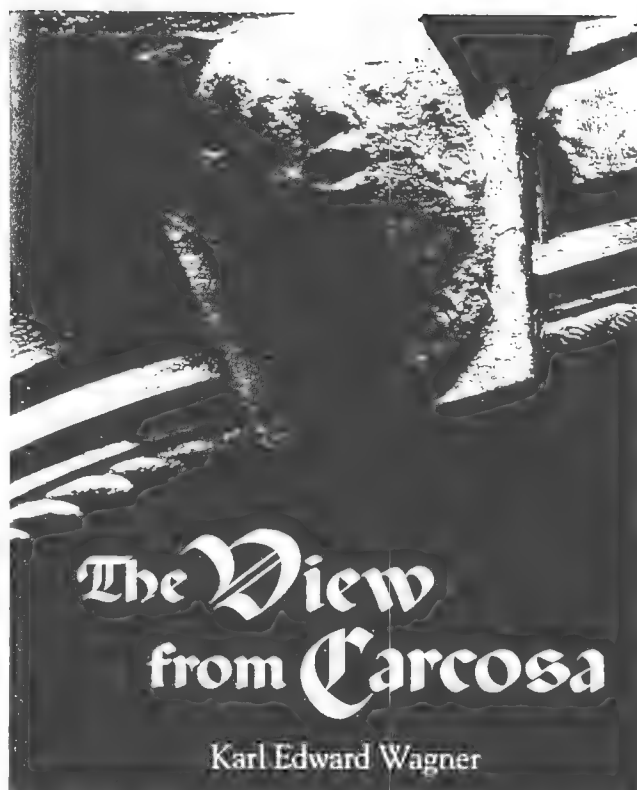
various characters who are chasing after someone called The Art Master, who wants to destroy all art. It sort of built up from a story. Plus a correspondent of mine from university. I used to send him my stories to comment on (I don't do it anymore because there was such a pile he got fed up), and in those early days in the early 70s, he commented back, and I included his comments in the novel. The actual comments are various chapters, they've become subsequent chapters, and it's just a mish-mash, a *me-lange* of I don't know what--horror stories, fantasy scenes, because I was very much into fantasy then."

We part at the Flask Pub, burrowed away in an artsy-fartsy corner of Hampstead; it occurs to me that much of Des' charm lies in the many facets to his character as well as the dichotomy between Dark Visionary and Conversational Nice Guy/Family Man that is its foundation. I find myself inspired by his persistence and his love of writing for writing's sake, his twisted affair with words. I wish him golden dreams, success, fame and fortune. But he shrugs it off with that secret sweet smile: "I don't think what I write will ever be enough to live on; I end up spending it all on stamps."

May time and the fruit of his efforts prove D. F. Lewis wrong.

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All quotes in italics from *THE BEST OF D. F. LEWIS*, published by Tal Publications. *Bognor Regis* quote from the "Problem Page" column in *OVERSPACE* #13.



#### The Meat Loaf Fantasycon Tour & Stuff

**IMPORTANT:** *Searchin' General's Warning! The following may contain references to sex, drugs, alcohol, and rock & roll. So if yer an uptight git, shove this magazine up yer ass & go play in traffic. And piss off.*

ANYWAY. DAVE DRAKE sez yer destructive. Yes. Very much so. But who wuz it who couldn't stop laughing when I tossed the willie pete grenades to the dolphins? No accounting. So. Yer man Doc Wagner fancies a pint and steams off to London at the autumnal solstice, ostensibly for the purpose of attending Fantasycon XVIII. Actually, it's XIX, but there was a falling out with the Elvsie-Welvsie contingent some years back (since machine-gunned), so one year had a different nomenclature--Lotsacuteunicornscon, I think it was. I wasn't on hand, but Dennis Etchison received his British Fantasy Award for *The Dark Country* in the rain at a garden party held elsewhere.

However, I digress. Dennis was to be Master of Ceremonies this year at Fantasycon in Birmingham, so old Doc Wagner stuffs a black goat into his cases and dashes off to help out. At London Heathrow he is met by the sinister Sylvia Starshine, but by his not so trusty Irish mate, Dave Carson, who is still fast asleep with the conger eels. Sly, a welder who had just created a metal tree for the Royal Opera or something, helped grab my cases and dragged me onto the tube, where she once again refused my offer to marry her or have her ears pierced. Sly is pissed off that her drawings haven't drawn notice and sez she's thinking of working under another name. I suggested Jeffrey Dahmer, but she didn't think so. Any editors looking for drawings from Sylvia Starshine can write to her at Flat 7, 23 Stanhope Road, Highgate, London N6 5AW. She also runs a crucial artshow.

Dave Carson eventually surfaces. He has drawn a pastel of Pike Bishop from *The Wild Bunch* getting shot up, looking rather like me. Alcohol was consumed. DC sez he's moving to Eastbourne. In the meantime, seekers of drawers may reach him at Flat 10, Block J, Peabody Estates, Horseferry Road, London SW1P 2EN. Put him on a tripod. DC does a mega drawing of a "wereturkey"--all the more impressive as DC has never seen a live turkey. I've sent the drawing to Mark, and you may see it here first (*Indeed. Look at the page next door--ye Ed*). DC is sad that the conger eel shop has shut down and hasn't been back to his local since we two were tossed out. DC is obsessed with Meat Loaf's new album, and I sang most of *I Would Do Anything For Love, But I Won't Do That* before we got tossed out of another pub.

There were three publisher's/book shop's launches going on the same night. Fantasy Centre (catalogues from 157 Holloway Road, London N7 8LX) was having a bash for Ronald Chetwynd-Hayes and his latest book *The Psychic Detective* (from Robert Hale and soon to be a Hammer film). Snag a copy from Robert Hale at Clerkenwell House, Clerkenwell Green, London EC1R 0HT at whatever the exchange rate is for fifteen quid--I reckon a bit over twenty-five bucks. Alcohol was consumed here. Both DC and I sampled it. Then, off to Penguin's launch for *The Time Out Book of London Short Stories*, a major anthology of new horror stories you gotta have at six quid from Penguin Books Ltd., 27 Wrights Lane, London W8 5TZ. Probably run you about ten bucks. Stories by Clive Barker, Neil Gaiman, Kim Newman, Lisa Tuttle, and lots more. Alcoholic beverages were served and Mr. Carson and yer man Wagner sipped a few to be polite. Finally there was a launch for Nicholas Royle's novel, *Counterparts*, at the Nellie Dean, one of yer man's fave pubs in Soho. The book is from Barrington Books, but I can't afford further details, as DC lost his legs somewhere along the trail and had to be taken home. On the taxi ride to his flat, I examined the drugs that had been forced upon me by degenerates whilst we talked about Meat Loaf's new album and the Second Coming. They were one and the same.

Met up with Kim Newman and the Etchisons (AKA Mr. & Mrs. Continental) at Euston for the train up to Birmingham for Fantasycon. They were dragging along only four of the six cases of luggage they'd had at Heathrow when Steve Jones and I met them there a few days previous. Kris said she'd brought along her riding boots. These Californians. Kinky. So, after helping lug this mess about, yer man Wagner has an asthma attack on the Birmingham platform, and Kim has to carry *his* case. Somehow we managed to stagger to the hotel, where Doc Wagner did his best Doc Holliday impersonation in the lobby. Welcome to Fantasycon. Half a bottle of JD cured him.

Fantasycon is not a con to miss. If you live in the UK: easy commute. From the US: you'll probably want to fly. This is an informal con--attendance usually about 150 or so, very many pros, easy to find at the bar. This year's was held once again at the Midland Hotel--a vast, sprawling pile of poshness that could hold half a dozen Stephen King exercises. Careful with that axe, Eugene. My room had the bathroom down the hallway--just that the hallway was in my room--and a short

stroll beyond was a wardrobe straight out of *Time Bandits*. Dennis claimed they had a jacuzzi in their room, but he wouldn't let anyone in to see.

As before, the main function room was adjacent to the bar, which made it easy to draw a crowd for the panels. The hotel has several bars, but this one was set up for the con--with pints sold at one pound (about half price) and hours till 3 in the morning (11pm is usual closing). Seeking a glass of milk, I made my way to the bar once breathing was restored, stumbling into Joel Lane on the way..Good writer, but the kid's got to learn to dodge, and I hope his leg heals. At the bar I found D. F. Lewis. I asked Des if he'd turned in his column for this issue of **DEATHREALM** yet; Des sez yes, so I shot him. As I was sharing a glass of milk with Nick Royle and Simon Clark, Des pops up from beneath the table and tries to tell me that he's written a six-page story. Shot him again.

Went to dinner at a Japanese place only a brisk five-mile walk from the hotel with the Ramsey Campbell family, the Etchisons and the usual lot of old-timers. We ate everything, cuz this dude with a great cleaver was watching us. Next night much of the same hit a Chinese place close by. The Campbells carried back six doggie bags for breakfast. Dennis groaned. Poor old Doc didn't eat much; he has a great idea as to what you can do with chopsticks. I still got rice in my beard. It's sprouting. The rice.

There were some panels and some films. Also an art-show, run by the sinister Sylvia Starshine, who still won't marry me or have her ears pierced. It's not easy having a good time. And there was a dealer's room, but this year it was dead dull boring, with almost no old moldy books and almost no dealers. Still, my mates held a signing for me in the bar to launch the new Penguin edition of *Darkness Weaves*. We sold one copy and that was to Tina Rath after I threatened never to use her stories in *Year's Best Horror* again. After fifteen minutes we quit and hit the bar. Two other book launches had the same success and response. No one complained. I have a rule never to plug my own books, but those kids at Penguin have worked so hard to put on this show that I gotta tell you the five books in the Kane series that have been published worldwide and brought in millions can be had once more from Penguin at five quid each, and I've already given the address.

Early hours of Sunday morning, I'm in the remains of the con bar drinking orange juice with rising super-artist Martin McKenna and his minnions. They are playing with a chocolate dildo that Sylvia wouldn't allow in the art show as part of the Dave Carson's talking liver exhibit. One of them pulls a condom over his head and inflates it. By 5 AM he's rolling about the floors, possibly suffocating. Old Doc Wagner has seen it all before and wanders off to get lost in his room. He has a panel in the morning.

The panel is at 11am--a strange hour for yer man to be awake--and is called "Is There Anybody Up There?"--a strange topic for yer man to be discussing. Pete Coleborn got a bit testy when I tried to beg off on grounds that I'd be in church, so I changed t-shirts and went down. Christopher Fowler was chairing the thing and as much in the dark as the rest of us, but he carried on well, with me, Ramsey Campbell, and Mark Morris as supporting cast. To our amazement, the room was packed--then we remembered that checkout was at noon, and these poor dudes had no other place to lay their heads. After we established that all on the panel were atheists (saving Wagner, who believes in sex, drugs, and rock and roll), Chris asked if there were any Christians in the audience. Only Tina Rath confessed, and yer man was certain that she was a lost member of the Golden Dawn. Anyway, we carried on till noon to some effect, and Ramsey Campbell was not turned into an almond tree.

After, I checked out and split for London with Kim Newman, who let me carry my own case. There was the usual awards banquet, with Dennis in tuxedo and great form, and the British Fantasy Awards were handed out (I think Jim Pitts got Best Artist). But I no longer attend awards banquets because the food is lame and I don't get awards. What else? Oh. Guests of Honor were Tad Williams, Peter James, and Les Edwards. And there were panels. And pints for only a quid. And the con seemed to run along smoothly and pleasantly. And how's that for my first con report in years? Shut up.

Point is that Fantasycon is a lot of fun and well laid-back. This is maybe the last of the "major" cons where you can rub shoulders with established writers and artists, the ones who are just making a name, and those who will be Big Names real soon (not to mention lots of gonzos with condoms over their heads), and just friendly fans. And pints only cost



## THE VIEW FROM CARCOSA

a pound. Dunno what the deal is for 1994, but you can likely find out by writing to this year's address: Fantasycon XVIII, 137 Priory Road, Hall Green, Birmingham, B28 0TG. That's England, not Alabama.

Back in London, Dave Carson has recovered from his night at the publishers' launches. We continue our expeditions through phone boxes collecting naughty cards for a projected book. Cards have become extremely rude and most carry illustrations. "19 Year Old Blonde Just out of School Needs Strict Headmaster for a Spanking Good Time." "Fantasy Fetish Specialist. Little Miss Madam Will Tie & Tease." "The Magic Touch. Miss Demeanor. A Supreme Wardrobe Mistress." These dudes really know how to party hearty. Carl Ford resurfaces--no word as to whether he'll revive his award-winning zine **DAGON**--and sez you phone up for an appointment and forty quid gets you a session. We didn't ask how he knew, and anyway he sez he's joined a coven. Probably for forty quid. John Stewart, major British artist, believed dead but on the mend, resurfaced and sez you can make twenty-five quid a day stuffing these cards into phone boxes if you don't get caught doing it. A long argument continues over various pints: is spanking or getting caned or being tied up or wearing knickers and a suspender belt to be considered a sexual act and therefore prostitution? Carl Ford sez nah, so long as there's no penetration they can't bust you. We sink pints and decline to ask how much more he knows. Carson and I get into a discussion on Meat Loaf's new album.

Richard O'Brien phones up to ask me round to his flat in Kensington for drinks. Richard is best known from *The Rocky Horror Picture Show*. He is doing well on British television these days, had just completed two commercials, and we only briefly talked about the sequel to *Rocky Horror--The Revenge of the Old Queen*. DC was too legless to come along by the time Linda Krawecka came to collect us, so I caught a taxi over. Richard's flat's terrace is larger than my house. Richard had a bottle of Bell's and some lagers; he was wearing his jogging sweats and carrying a guitar that looked like an acoustic Fender Stratocaster. He serenaded me with several of his new songs (yer man left his recorder in Chapel Hill) which were all in the country western vein. Genial Doc attempted to coach him on a proper Tennessee accent (Richard is from New Zealand), but neither of us knew what we were about. Richard sez I oughta quit writing horror/fantasy and go mainstream. I agreed. We broke out into a duet medley of Hank Williams, Willie Nelson, Patsy Cline, and other classic composers. At half twelve, I caught a taxi, probably just before the police arrived.

Carson has taped *Bat Out of Hell II* for me, and we both agree it's a mega comeback for Meat Loaf and Jim Steinman. The album is crucial. Do what yer doctor sez: get a copy. Horror awaits you. I told DC that Richard O'Brien had paid me one of the greatest compliments of my life, when he sez: "You're insane. You're really insane." DC thinks this calls for a sip of JD, but someone has bought all the JD available at area off-licenses.

Did I mention drugs? Lessee: alcohol, sex, rock and

roll.... Hell, there must have been drugs involved somewhere. Maybe at "Thru the Looking Glass. A TV Experience," cuz that's not your horizontal control yer woman on the card is adjusting on the dude.

Phoned up one of my old London Wild Bunch mates, John Eggeing, but he was unable to make it into town. He sent me his new catalogue of strange books--seems mostly into colonial authors now, but still has a good bit of supernatural. Worth checking out at Claremont South, Burnley Road, Todmorden, Lancs OL14 5LH. Book hunting for older stuff in London is pretty dicey now. Americans bought them all.

Sylvia and DC came over to help me pack and finish a bottle of Jim Beam. Somehow we made it to Heathrow, and I made it home. I'm not sure they did.

\*\*\*\*\*

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# Inside Horror Publishing

By Jeanne Cavelos

EVERYONE HAS THEIR own theories about what's happening in the horror market. Some say horror is dead. Some say the horror market moves in cycles. Others focus on the recent success of young adult horror. I think if you look at the overall changes in the book trade market, you'll see that a lot of the changes in horror are reflected in the book market in general.

Over the past five years, publishing has become more and more of a niche business, as have many other businesses. While in the old days tons of books were marketed and sold to the "mass market," these days, the "mass market" is perceived to actually be a collection of many different categories, or niche-markets, such as romance, science fiction, mystery, horror, westerns, true crime, health, etc. The old-fashioned midlist books, which were not marketed to a specific niche, or categorized, no longer sell in today's market, where readers are more sophisticated, know what type of book they want, and look to publishers to make it clear what they're selling.

A similar process has happened in horror. While about ten years ago most of the horror novels coming out looked alike and were marketed alike (the assumption being, I think, that almost all horror readers were 13 year old boys), now there are a number of different types of horror being marketed in different ways to different niche markets. Dell's horror line, Abyss, which I edit, appeals to the more sophisticated reader, who has read a number of traditional horror novels and is looking for something different. The covers look different

from those on other horror books and the books are marketed differently. There are also a number of publishers who have started young adult horror lines, to specifically cater to that teenage boy (and girl) crowd. And there are still the traditional horror lines--though these are fading and much smaller than they once were--to appeal to readers in between these two extremes. Vampire books also form a niche of their own, and for a while, serial killer fiction did as well. Niches come and go, as do fashions. There are millions of different permutations on the novel, on the creativity of the human mind. I disagree with those who say that horror is dead. There are obviously many people out there who still love horror in its traditional sense. But I also believe that the emotion of horror and the dark atmosphere of a horror novel are spreading more widely into fiction in general. As we perceive our quality of life decreasing, our planet deteriorating, and so many negative qualities gaining hold in our society, I don't think it's any surprise that sunny optimism is having a tough time. And as horror grows and mutates, and in its many subtle permutations takes over fiction, people may not recognize what surrounds them. They may say horror is dead, when in truth what has happened is that horror has completely taken over our culture.

Okay, I'm exaggerating some, but I don't think anyone can deny the incredible energy and excitement that some of our new horror writers are bringing to the field. Let me just take a moment to fill you in on some of the great writers Dell will be publishing this

Fall and Winter. Poppy Z. Brite, whose new hardcover **DRAWING BLOOD** has just come out, has been receiving incredible praise, not only comparing her to greats like Rice, King, and Barker, but calling her "highly literate" and "important." Not the types of things most mainstream reviewers come up with when reviewing horror. Michael Blumlein, whose **X,Y** just came out, is writing about sex, gender, and the games men and women play with each other. A medical doctor and incredible writer, Michael has been praised by everyone from Katherine Dunn to Peter Straub to Harlan Ellison. And then there's Kathe Koja, whose book **SKIN** will be coming out in paperback in February and whose new hardcover **STRANGE ANGELS** will be out in May. Kathe's work has been compared to "a collaboration between Clive Barker and William S. Burroughs." She's one of those writers traveling that shadow area between horror and mainstream fiction, working to stretch the boundaries of horror. If you need any reassurance that this genre is still vital and important, read any of these writers. And if you don't need any reassurance (which I think is more likely), read these writers anyway for an inspiring glimpse at what horror can be.

I hope I've helped give you a better idea of the changes that have occurred both in publishing in general and in horror publishing. I hope to be giving you more inside horror news in upcoming issues.

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*Jeanne Cavelos is a senior editor at Dell Publishing and is founder and editor of the Abyss imprint.*

(Continued from page 31)

wolf type critter, too aptly named Wolff. And what do you think would befall these pseudo heroes? They become the latest flavor of Purina Dog Chow, that's what. Surprised? I wasn't either. The piece is very well-written, and indeed, the novel may be a good book, but this excerpt is just too predictable to cast a good light upon it.

I must admit that *The Hunt* by Steve Rasnic Tem threw me off a bit by being a tad decent, and the imagery in this story and in Nancy Kilpatrick's *Memories of El Dia De Los Muertos* were exceptional. The downside of this sudden flood of decency is that after reading *The Hunt*, I began to suspect that even Ronald McDonald could be a pedophile. Also, Nancy's story gave me the impression that it was something of another Ann Rice-style rite of hedonistic passage.

The next two stories, *Tick* by Richard F. McGonegal and *Double Boogie* by Rick Witherow, both began with a quick blurb about clocks--digital clocks to be exact. I would tend to think that Douglas Adams has picked up two new pen names, but these snatches of prose weren't at all humor-filled. *Tick* depicted the real-life dangers of Bambi-hunting, while *Double Boogie* had me glancing at the front cover to make sure it did not read **HIGHLIGHTS**.

Sean Brodrick is a senior editor of the beloved tabloid, **GLOBE**. To my absolute shock, Sean had the *only* real page-turner in this tome. *Dark Tide Rising* is a very engaging story that has one of the better short story endings I've read in the pickings that my demented editor has dropped in the corner of my cage. And right on Sean's heels followed an entertaining macabre morsel from Scott Thomas, entitled *The Wreck of Wickhampton*.

Now, the visual presentation of **DEAD OF NIGHT** is slick and the cover art by Allen Koszowski is--needless to say--downright scary. As this is the only issue of **DEAD OF NIGHT** I've ever seen, perhaps I only happened upon a fluke. Time will tell.

A smattering of attractive art by Marge Simon and Cathy Buburuz also

helped keep the journey through the 64 pages of the magazine bearable. Bless them both.

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**WICKED MYSTIC #22, PO Box 3087, Astoria, NY 11103. Editor: Andre Scheluchin. 8.5" x 11". 100 pages. \$6.50**

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SOMETIMES I LIE awake at night, cold and shivering even though the furnace is belching hot air throughout the house. I am aware of the shadow stirring within, whispering me back to sleep. Back to where the tingly threads of fright grind away at my security. It is these episodes that tell me that the words that I have read before going to bed sank into my inner darkness, waking the demons there. I awake alone, only to find myself clutching the sheets and hyperventilating.

In short, **WICKED MYSTIC** scared the sh\*t out of me. No wonder it was nominated for Best Magazine of 1993 by SPWAO and has recently gone to a large format with a load of good software to put together a real slick package. It is at this point that many megabyte mavericks go bust: "Everything *looks* good, so whatever the U.S. Postal Service dumps in the mailbox we will accept and present to the horror-hungered masses!"

Sometimes slick exteriors and good reading are just not to be found in combination; I won't name a couple of the better-known offenders that I've written about in the past. To find the mix done effectively it is kind of like shotgunning lemonade: poundingly refreshing.

The first surprise I got was when I opened up the magazine, all of these little plastic bats fell out all over the place. Although the little black gifts didn't improve the quality of the art or writing, they did help set the mood. Besides, I just love bats. On the literary side of things, John Grey is featured heavily in this issue with lots of poems and a good interview, which delved into his development of his poetry. My thirst was quenched with his poems spread through the "100 pages of pure mayhem." But John didn't overshadow the issue. There are 20 short stories and more than twice that many poems con-

tained within this quality publication,

I was pleasantly surprised to see Albany, New York's prized possession, Paul "White Boy" Weinmann, put in a good piece of work that differs from his usual fare. He is really beginning to show his versatility. The short story *Cemetery Dreams* by Sherry S. Day put a good dent into the graven image called plot twist. You *know* the girl is going to die (don't they all?) but it's the *how* that's surprising.

Robert Segarra anted up with the poem *The Greenwood Sleepers*. This gem reminded me of the fright I felt, as a 12 year old, when I read J.R.R. Tolkien's *Mewlips*. A very good weaving of the terrors that live in our backyards. Three poems from Kim Elizabeth pop to the surface, *Just Another Day in the 18th Century Sanitarium* being my favorite. Along with the poetry, you'll find a brief article on her latest book, *Netherworld*.

The world of Vampirism is firmly represented in **WICKED MYSTIC**. Several Vampire poems, notably *Saint Bloodsucker* by Amber J. Smiley and *Blood* by L. Grant Whitney, along with an article on Vlad himself, and a curious piece on a company from Salt Lake City who are selling tiny amounts of actual dirt from Vlad's Castle.

Other bits of dark strangeness adds to the texture of the magazine. There is a report on criminal activity concerning Barbie dolls. It seems that Sandusky, Ohio has a sicko that has returned 24 of the dolls back to store shelves with the breasts and groins slashed. One man in New York state mailed cut up Barbies covered with fake blood to God knows who. Also included is a schedule for all the upcoming Full Moons and a recipe for the alcohol heavy drink titled *The F\*cked Cobra*. Deadly.

From the dark grey ink on black card stock cover to the quality writing to the friendly plastic bats, trust me, **WICKED MYSTIC** is not to be missed. I've got my furnace set on 85 and wouldn't have it any other way.

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# WHO'S WHO IN DEATHREALM

**William Bowers** resides in Scarborough, Ontario. His short fiction has appeared in **TYRO Magazine**, **CHIPS OFF THE WRITER'S BLOCK** and others. He was a founding member of **THE MURDER AND MAYHEM SOCIETY**, a club for Mystery writers in Toronto.

**Cathy Buburuz & Marge Simon** of Regina, Saskatchewan and Ocala, Florida respectively, have collaborated on many a piece of art in the past, with sales to dozens of small press markets.

**Deidre Cox** is Garrett, Kentucky's resident Satani--er, horror writer extraordinaire, author of over 70 published works of short fiction. Take a look at her interview in this issue for a fine profile of this prolific author.

**Denise Dumars** of Sunset Beach, California, has wrapped up her final issue of **DUMARS REVIEWS**. She and her writing partner, Nancy Ellis Taylor, are hard at work on producing screenplays, and her new book of horror and science fictions shorts, entitled **PANGAEA** has recently been released by Wordcraft of Oregon.

**Michael Dunhour** of San Jose, California, works as a graphic artist for a computer gaming company. His illustrations have appeared in **SPACE & TIME**, **MIDNIGHT ZOO** and **ABERATIONS**.

**Joe Elchehabi**, once a ninth circle novitiate of the Starry Wisdom Church of Providence, Rhode Island, was excommunicated for his "heretical poetic ideologies." Afraid for his life, he now lives somewhere, in complete isolation, in the boonies of North Carolina. (If any Starry Wisdom cult members would like Mr. Elchehabi's address, please send a SASE to the editor.)

**Harry Fassl** of Oak Park, Illinois, is the one to hold responsible for any cardiac seizures suffered as a result of viewing this issue's cover. Do not feed this man.

**Rodger Gerberding** currently lives in Council Bluffs, IA, in close proximity to the fair editor of **THIN ICE** Magazine. Apart from his role as illustrator, he is art editor of **TALES OF THE UNANTICIPATED** and frequent attendee of the notorious Minn-Con gatherings held in Minneapolis each year.

**Chad Hensley** lives in Austin, Texas, and has had numerous poems appear in **DEATHREALM**. He has begun trying his hand at short fiction, and has seen publication in Tal's **BIZARRE BAZAAR '92 & 93**.

**Nancy Kilpatrick's** 50 horror stories have appeared or will appear in such publications as: **BIZARRE BAZAAR**, **DEATHPORT**, **FREAK SHOW**, **YEAR'S BEST HORROR XX & XXII**. Her story *Farm Wife*, published in **NORTHERN FRIGHTS 1**, was a finalist for both an Aurora Award and a Bram Stoker Award. Look for her horror novel **NEAR DEATH**, out from Pocket Books in September 1994.

**Allen Koszowski** hardly requires an introduction. Without question, horror's premiere illustrator, Mr. Koszowski's gruesome artwork has appeared in virtually every conceivable horror market over the last decade, from the biggest pro publications to the smallest of the small press.

**D. F. Lewis** is **DEATHREALM's** featured columnist "across the Atlantic." His writing credits are varied and impressive, on both sides of the ocean, with some 500 published works to his name.

**Malak** is the legal name of one of Virginia Beach, Virginia's more ominous artists. His illustration for William Trotter's *Siren of Swanquarter* is among his first published appearances; his work has also appeared in **THE TOME**. He has been active at conventions for many years out on the west coast.

**John Mercer** is apparently a neighbor of William Bowers, for he too resides in Scarborough, Ontario, and together with Nancy Kilpatrick, shows that the Great White North is tenaciously moving southward. John has provided illustrations for **AD ASTRA CON**, **THE GLOBE & MAIL NEWSPAPER**, **THE CANADIAN CARTOONISTS ASSOCIATION** and many others.

**Keith Minnion**, of Philadelphia, has sold short fiction to **ASIMOV'S**, **MZB'S FANTASY MAGAZINE** and **DRAGON**, and has an SF novel currently making the publisher rounds. For the last year he has begun selling horror illustrations to such markets as **DEATHREALM**, **CEMETERY DANCE**, **WEIRD TALES** and **BIZARRE BAZAAR**.

**Mark Rich**, of Stevens Point, Wisconsin, has been recently published in **ANALOG** Magazine, as well as in many small press markets. His poetry has appeared in **DEATHREALM** previously, but *House Dogs* is his first short story here.

**William R. Trotter**, another of Greensboro's multi-talented authors--doing double duty this time around as both storyteller and interviewer--has recently seen the hardback edition from Dutton of his first novel, **WINTER FIRE** (reviewed in **DEATHREALM #18**), and the paperback edition will be available in February, 1994. His short fiction has appeared in **NIGHT CRY** and in several earlier issues of **DEATHREALM**.

**Augie Weidemann**, Kingston, New York, has contributed many an illustration to **DEATHREALM**, including issue #18's striking cover. His work has appeared in **GRUE**, **2AM**, **QUICK CHILLS II**, **BIZARRE BAZAAR**, **ELDRITCH TALES**, innumerable others.

**J. N. Williamson** has appeared in **DEATHREALM** a couple of times previously, so he's definitely hit the big time. Otherwise, he is author of numerous short stories and over 30 novels including **THE BLACK SCHOOL**, **SPREE**, **THE NIGHT SEASONS**, many more. He resides in Indianapolis when he's not lurking somewhere in the shadows.